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Tuesday 18 May 2004

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mardi 18 mai 2004

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 18 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 18 mai 2004

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Today at 4 pm Finance Minister Greg Sorbara will without question break the laws of the province of Ontario. This betrayal to the working families of Ontario will result in Ontario returning to the lost decade.

Ontario's working families will remember finance critic Gerry Phillips last year stating that Ontario, with a loss of revenues as a result of BSE and SARS, could be facing a $5-billion deficit. Ontario's working families will recall the election campaign and the TV ads, where Dalton McGuinty clearly stated, "I will not raise your taxes." Ontario's working families will recall the famous photo op when Dalton McGuinty signed the Taxpayer Protection Act.

Ontario's working families will recall Dalton McGuinty and his candidates promising not to run deficits. Ontario's working families will recall Dalton McGuinty and all his candidates promising to deliver balanced budgets. Ontario's working families will recall the orgy of broken promises since October 2.

Ontario's working families will today see increased taxes, the demise of a strong economy, more broken promises and the official introduction of two-tier health in Ontario. The citizens of Ontario have been betrayed. Any tax increase or deficit requires a referendum by the citizens of Ontario. That is the law.

The lost decade has returned. The working families of Ontario have caught on to the Fiberals and their leader. In a highly touted speech today, Greg Sorbara will send Ontario back to the era of tax and spend. Ontarians had eight and a half years of a government that made and kept their promises. Today Ontarians live under a government that thrives on breaking their promises.

VICTORIAN ORDER OF NURSES

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Last week was Nursing Week. On Friday, I was invited by the local Victorian Order of Nurses to join registered nurse Ruth Anne Luckhart as she made home care visits in Stratford.

We visited Mary, a senior living at home. She suffers from constant pain and uses a technological breakthrough, a pain pump. Every three days the VON come to her house to change the site of her subcutaneous injection. Then we were off to visit another constituent, Paul. He's 28. He and his wife have a toddler and a newborn infant at home. Paul suffers from Crohn's disease and recently had a temporary colostomy. I watched as Ruth Anne changed his dressing.

I was impressed by the professionalism and care of a remarkable registered nurse. That is why I believe we must direct more resources to home care. It allows people to get better surrounded by their loved ones in their own homes, and frees up beds in our hospitals.

On Sunday, I was proud to represent the government at an appreciation brunch for those remarkable people who volunteer throughout the year for the Huron-Perth VON. Over 100 citizens were thanked for providing the work that makes our community such a wonderful and caring place to live.

I'm sure that all of my colleagues at the Legislature join me in thanking the dedicated staff and volunteers of the Victorian Order of Nurses.

CONSERVATION

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): As this government continues with its Greenbelt Protection Act, I describe an ambitious farmer-driven conservation plan taking shape in my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant and elsewhere in Canada. I speak of the alternate land use services, or ALUS. It's a program headed up by our local Norfolk land stewardship council.

Through ALUS, good stewardship of the environment is not just a personal responsibility, it's also a public value that's based on payment to farmers for rendering ecological services that provide environmental benefits to the public at large. ALUS not only protects and enhances natural areas, it also encourages environmental partnerships between rural and urban Ontarians, and between government, landowners and conservationists.

While the Greenbelt Protection Act simply freezes development, the ALUS program goes further by encouraging the planting of trees and the setting aside of land for growth of marshes, grassland, forest cover and natural wildlife habitat, all with the public paying for the environmental benefits that society at large will derive.

I'm happy to say the proposed pilot project for ALUS to be implemented in Norfolk county has received strong

support: 37 different organizations have contributed their logo to the proposal, 10 have shelled out $45,000 for a benchmark survey, and the MNR will continue to fund this pilot at the $20,000 level that our government initiated in 2003.

TOWN OF WALLACEBURG

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): The year 2004 is a very significant year for Wallaceburg, which is one of the largest communities in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Wallaceburg traces its roots to 102 brave souls who set sail from Scotland over 200 years ago. They had made a solemn agreement with the fifth Earl of Selkirk to cross the Atlantic and build new lives for themselves in Upper Canada.

These extraordinary people met with numerous misfortunes: bitter winter snows, overwhelming spring floods, malaria-carrying mosquitoes, invading American troops who looted the community during the War of 1812, and unyielding administrative incompetence. Thankfully, they also had helpful and co-operative neighbours in the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Pottawatomi First Nations to help them weather these difficulties. They also had the courage to keep going.

Today a local group of volunteers, the Baldoon bicentennial committee, is assisting Wallaceburg to celebrate the fact that 200 years after the landing, it has become an industrious community of over 10,000 in southwestern Ontario that continues to build for its children's future.

Wallaceburg is celebrating this year, and in early September they will have events like the Highland Games and a re-enactment of the Selkirk settlers' landing. We welcome everyone to come to Wallaceburg. I know that all Ontarians will feel as welcome as I do when they visit there.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Deborah Walden of Thorold got ripped off by Co-operators insurance, and she is some ticked off. Co-operators insurance agent Vern Furtney got a letter from her on March 16. In that letter, she says to Mr Furtney that he is "a lying, cheating, thieving, scum-sucking weasel," and that he is "a 'bait and switch' operating dickhead."

She doesn't stop there. She has been picketing Co-operators on Fourth Avenue at Ridley Square in St Catharines, with her picket sign telling the world that Co-operators—and, quite frankly, all private for-profit auto insurance—is a rip-off and a scam, and she's been collecting thousands of names on petitions.

In fact, Co-operators sent the police to try to have her busted. The police said, "We're not going to arrest you." Quite frankly, I suspect the cops who arrived agreed with her and her opinion about Co-operators and every other private, for-profit insurance company.

1340

Two weeks ago, she got a letter from a high-priced law firm saying that Co-operators is going to sue her. I joined her last Saturday, picketing outside Co-operators' Vern Furtney agency in St Catharines. I agree with her: Vern Furtney and Co-operators are a rip-off. But then again, so is every private, for-profit auto insurance company and auto insurance premium here in Ontario.

We presented thousands of names on petitions yesterday. We'll keep on presenting those petitions and joining Ms Walden as she encourages thousands of other Ontarians to call for public auto insurance in this province—a true end to the highway robbery.

MEAL EXCHANGE

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I rise today to speak to this House about entrepreneurship and volunteerism, and how these two ideals can go hand in hand to make a big difference in all Canadians' lives.

Two weeks ago, a graduate of Wilfrid Laurier University visited me here at Queen's Park. This young entrepreneur brought with him information on a great program he had started while at Wilfrid Laurier. The program is called Meal Exchange. As a freshman, Rahul Raj wanted to ensure that the meal points that he would not use on his one-size-fits-all meal plan were not wasted. Out of this concern, Meal Exchange was born, a program which exchanges unused meal points on university campus meal plans to order food from the university's wholesalers, which in turn students deliver to shelters and charities.

Rahul began this program in 1993, and since then this great partnership of entrepreneurship and volunteerism has spanned to 21 Canadian universities with a grassroots group of approximately 50 volunteer staff who run the program out of their homes. Rahul still heads the program, spending 30 hours a week at night to keep the meals coming.

This program could not have been successful without Rahul's commitment. Although awarded a two-year $16,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 1997, Rahul has invested $40,000 of his own money to keep the program running. I believe in programs such as Meal Exchange and I hope that my colleagues here at Queen's Park also applaud the work that Rahul has done.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Good government is about setting priorities: finding solutions to urgent problems that affect all Ontarians.

Yesterday, we learned from Minister Meilleur that she considers the appointment of a language ombudsman a top priority. I respectfully suggest that this somewhat scary proposition is a reflection of social-engineering Liberals' priorities. I further suggest that personal safety, especially the safety of our children, ranks as a higher priority.

I am offended by the suggestion that the hiring of a linguistic top cop is considered a higher priority in Ontario than the hiring of front-line police officers. We've heard over and over that many Ontario citizens fear for their safety, especially in urban areas. They want to see more police officers patrolling the streets, they want to see more officers investigating gangs and organized crime, and they want a government committed to protecting their children.

Creating a force similar to the language police that have created havoc with ordinary citizens and businesses in the province of Quebec should not be a priority of this Liberal government. Their priorities should be hiring more front-line police officers and providing small municipalities with the resources they need and deserve to support their police services.

MacNAB STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I am pleased today to acknowledge the 150th anniversary of MacNab Street Presbyterian Church in Hamilton. This church is a beautifully preserved heritage church in the centre of our wonderful city. Built in 1854, one of its most remarkable features is its windows, designed by Edinburgh artists and considered to be the finest example of stained glass anywhere in Canada.

The MacNab Street Presbyterian Church is but one magnificent example of architecture in the streets of downtown Hamilton. Some buildings are ravaged by time and use, but still they display their architectural elegance.

I invite all Ontarians to discover the wonders of Hamilton's history. The church has much to celebrate: a grand Hamilton heritage and the good company kept with the likes of the McQuesten and Buchanan families and other prominent Hamiltonians throughout its history.

Although the neighbourhood has certainly changed since the church's inception, it still serves as a spiritual home to a congregation of over 300 families. I commend Reverend J. Mark Lewis for the energetic spirit of his congregation and the very energetic anniversary festivities that will be culminated in December with A Dickens of a Christmas and the old adage, "The more the merrier." I bring you this information today because I would like my colleagues to know about a wonderful jewel at the end of the lake named Hamilton that is worth the trip and the exploration.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Evidently, the geniuses in the Premier's office are at it once again. Just days after the resounding—no, gargantuan—rejection of Premier McGuinty's weak leadership and broken promises in Hamilton East, they have come up with another great plan, this new Dalton McGuinty health care tax that's going to cost working families potentially $1,000 per household. This shows the same judgment as that of Kevin Costner when he followed up Waterworld with The Postman. Another way you can describe this: One wonders if it's going to be like a Liberal health care user fee; if you don't pay your $1,000 per household, you can't access health care.

I know that the member for Sudbury didn't come up with this plan. The member for Kingston and the Islands seems like a reasonable enough member, but just like the Toronto Star reported this week—a lot of questions from disgruntled Liberal caucus members over the decisions in the Premier's office. Even the education minister was openly questioning the wisdom of the backroom strategy. Clearly it wasn't caucus; it had to be a Don Guy or a Matt Maychak. We never did find out who brought forward the soup and salad tax, but it was the same backroom adviser who has emerged from the bowels of the Premier's office, lugging this electoral albatross of the $1,000 health care increase. I remember the Premier looking into the TV screens and saying he was not going to raise taxes, perpetrating the biggest voter fraud in the history of Ontario.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. In just seven short months, you've established your reputation in this province as a breaker of promises, unreliable and not to be trusted. You promised Ontarians that you wouldn't raise taxes for working families. We're about two hours from a budget here and there's a general consensus that you will break yet many more promises in the next few hours. Can you confirm for this House that in this budget, as it is predicted that you will break the promise not to raise taxes, you'll at least keep the other half of your promise that you will have a referendum first, before you raise those taxes, that you will get the support of Ontarians through a referendum?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): At 4 o'clock today all will be revealed, and I'm sure the member's genuine curiosity with respect to our budget will be fully and completely satisfied. We are making, no doubt about it, some very difficult decisions within the context of the budget. But I can tell you that there are some things we have specifically chosen not to do: We will not fire water inspectors, we will not fire meat inspectors, we will not fire teachers and we will not fire nurses.

1350

Mr Klees: I'm going to ask the Premier if he will repeat after me, "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, do promise, if my party is elected in the next government, that I will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters." The reason I'm asking the Premier to

repeat after me is because he signed that pledge on September 11, 2003. Now we are just about to go into the budget. I'm going to ask the Premier what has changed that he is not prepared to make the same commitment now, when we'll have a budget two hours from now, that he made on September 11, 2003. Will he do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I can say that we have devoted an unprecedented amount of time and energy to consulting Ontarians before this, their budget. They have told us that they want us to invest in their health care, and we intend to do that. They've told us they want us to invest in their education, and we intend to do that. They've told us never, ever to forget our most vulnerable. They feel a sense of responsibility toward those people, and so do we, and our budget will reflect that.

We have listened to the people of Ontario, we have heard their concerns, and today, through our budget, we will deliver the leadership that they can count on.

Mr Klees: The people of Ontario have listened to this Premier for the last seven months. What they've heard is continual breaking of his word to the people of Ontario. What the people of Ontario want from this Premier is that he keep at least one promise. If he's not going to keep the promise, as we know he won't in this budget this afternoon, not to raise taxes, why will this Premier not at least keep the promise to the people of Ontario that, before he does raise taxes, he will go to them, not through focus groups, but through a referendum? That is what this Premier pledged to do. We're challenging the Premier now to have the courage to go to the people of Ontario and hear from them through a referendum as to whether or not the budget he'll present this afternoon is acceptable to the people of Ontario.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me offer some gratuitous and unsolicited advice in the matter of leadership to my friend here. There is a time to listen, there is a time to hear, there is a time to act and a time to lead. We are acting today, through this budget; we are leading today, through this budget; and we are going to satisfy the single most important concern on the part of the people of Ontario, and that is their public services. We're going to revitalize the public services in the province of Ontario.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is to the Premier. The people of Ontario are waiting for the time, Premier, when you will keep your promises: your promises that you will not raise taxes, your promises that you will hold the line on taxes. Today in the newspapers we read about an OHIP premium tax to be imposed on working families in Ontario, so I decided to go back and look at the Liberal fiscal bible on OHIP premium elimination: the 1989 Ontario budget. In this place 14 years ago—May 17, 1989—the Treasurer at the time, Robert Nixon, and the Peterson government eliminated the tax. Here is what he said about it. He said, "The budget provides individuals and families with $1 billion in direct savings and lower taxes through the elimination of OHIP premiums."

Do you agree, Premier, with the Peterson government, Mr Nixon and the Liberal brain trust of the day, such as it was, that OHIP premiums are taxes imposed on working families in Ontario?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I really do appreciate the references to matters arising in the last millennium. Let me just say that we have a challenge before us today, and that's to find a way to put our health care here in the province of Ontario on a vibrant and sustainable footing. We are rising to that challenge. We are going to find a way to make absolutely essential investments. It's not just a matter of money, and I'm sure my friend opposite appreciates this. It's a matter of reducing waiting times for things like cardiac care, cancer care, MRIs, CTs and cataracts. That is what we are determined to do. We're going to throw everything we can behind our effort to improve health care for Ontarians.

Mr Flaherty: I hear the Premier say this new tax on working families will improve access to health care. Premier, surely you've checked the Liberal records on that. Treasurer Nixon, May 17, 1989, and I quote: "The Social Assistance Review Committee indicated that it believes the elimination of Ontario health insurance plan premiums 'is essential and would greatly improve access to health care.'" The elimination of the tax improves access to health care: 1989, Liberals of the day, Mr Peterson's government, Robert Nixon, Treasurer of Ontario.

What has happened in your mind that you've come to this strange conclusion that by imposing a tax on working families of Ontario, you are somehow going to improve access to health care, contrary to the Liberal thinking of 14 years ago?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm not going to speak to the specifics of the speculation with respect to the budget, which will be delivered in this House very shortly, but I can say that Ontarians have a very good sense of where we want to go in the matter of health care.

This Minister of Health is bringing a notion that has been missing from health care in Ontario for a long time. It's called accountability. We're going to get genuine results in terms of better patient care. We're already working to employ more full-time nurses in Ontario. We've already made some dramatic announcements with respect to how we're going to improve long-term care for our seniors. I am proud to say there is much more to come when we invest in health care in a way through this budget that will bring about still better performance for patients.

Mr Flaherty: Not only is the imposition of this tax on the working families of Ontario a breach of a promise, another broken promise by this Premier; it's also the imposition of a regressive tax. If you bothered to look back at what your Liberal government did back in 1985 to 1990, you would see on page 8 of the budget in 1989, "The elimination of OHIP premiums is a major benefit to

low-income individuals and families." Of course it is, because it's a regressive tax. Why in the world would you go backwards 15 years, impose a tax on the working families of Ontario, which you never mentioned during the election campaign, and flip-flop on the position that your Liberal government took 14 years ago?

Hon Mr McGuinty: As foreign a concept as this may be to our friends opposite, this budget is not motivated by political expediency. It is not motivated by short-term political interest. This budget is entirely motivated by our sincere desire to do the right thing for the people of Ontario, and that's what we're going to do.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. New question.

CHINESE GATEWAY

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Minister of Tourism. Get ready.

Interjections.

Ms Churley: I'll go get him.

Minister, Victoria, Vancouver, Montreal, San Francisco and London all have traditional Chinese gateways framing their popular Chinatown commercial areas. Thanks to the hard work of former councillor Jack Layton, myself, and in particular the Toronto East Chinatown chamber of commerce, we have a proposal to build the first Chinese archway—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'd like to hear the member for Toronto-Danforth's question.

Ms Churley: Thanks to the hard work of many of us in the community—

Interjections.

Ms Churley: Thanks to the hard work of Jack Layton, the former councillor of the area, myself and the east end Chinese chamber of commerce—

The Speaker: Question.

Ms Churley: —we have a proposal to build—wait a minute. They interrupted my question.

They have a proposal to build the first Chinese archway in Toronto. They are raising money in the community and the city of Toronto has provided some funding. Minister, the project is very important to the Chinese community in my riding. and indeed across the city. Will you pledge support to help build this Chinese archway in Toronto east Chinatown?

1400

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): I don't know if I agree with who is important in this. I appreciate that the present member for Toronto-Danforth is very committed to this project. She has been kind enough to draw this to my attention in the past and has provided me with some additional information, including information about the CBC program on it, which was very good. I look forward to working with the provincial member for Toronto-Danforth and with whomever they choose as the federal member for Danforth. It may even be Dennis Mills, the long-time, hard-working member, or it may be the individual my friend Marilyn Churley mentioned earlier. That's the choice of the electorate.

I think it's a good project. I want to work with her. I've committed to going down to the area with her and other officials to view the potential project there, because I think it's got a lot of potential.

Ms Churley: Indeed, this is a very important project to the riding of Toronto-Danforth. I've had the privilege of working alongside the Chinese community and the east Chinatown chamber of commerce for a number of years now. They work very hard in the community. They work day and night in their small businesses. They were particularly devastated by the SARS outbreak, as you are well aware. I'm doing everything I can to assist them in getting the appropriate funding to get this project up and running.

China itself has donated, and sitting in storage right now are two huge hand-carved lions and material for the gates. It's an incredible project that will not only help east-end Toronto, but will lead to improved tourism across the city of Toronto. I'm hoping you will join me in meeting with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce some time in the near future so we can discuss in more detail how the province of Ontario can be of some assistance.

Hon Mr Bradley: I would welcome the opportunity to meet with the officials who have been suggested by the member for Toronto-Danforth. She is quite right in knowing there is a huge potential in tourism not only for Toronto, but for the entire province. As people come to Toronto from around the world, and then into other destinations in this province, the project she has discussed is one that I think not only will contribute immensely to the Chinese heritage in Toronto—the Chinese community has been a hard-working and contributing community to Toronto—but it also has tremendous potential for tourism in this province, particularly as we reach out more and more to various points in the world to attract tourists to our area.

So I am delighted to meet with the officials of the Chinese community she has mentioned, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and others in her constituency. I know she will be there to accompany me to these meetings and introduce me to the appropriate people. I think it's a winner for everybody.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The Northeast Mental Health Centre is being forced to cut services in order to balance its budget, and the impact on children includes the following: the end of mental health services for children under six in Sudbury district, east Manitoulin Island and Espanola; the end of mental health supports for children in CAS foster care; the end of the district day treatment program, which permits high

school students to finish their credits while being treated for substance abuse; a reduction in services for children who are dually diagnosed with mental illness and developmental disability; and an increase in the wait time for preschool language and speech service from eight months to one year.

On April 2 the board wrote to your ministry, asking for $436,000 to avoid these devastating cuts. On April 15, your ministry said no. Why, Minister, is your ministry turning its back on these children?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): In fact, I'd like to reassure the honourable member that we will be looking at all of those programs right after today's budget. We have done consultations across the province. We're well aware of the need. We're well aware of how these programs were gutted over the last decade—no increases—and we have begun our planning, but we needed to wait for today to see the whole picture financially of the ministries, and we will go forward to solve the problems. I want to thank her for bringing this to my attention.

Ms Martel: Minister, the board made a very specific request on April 2 for $436,000, and on April 15 your ministry said no. And I can tell you, because I read the letter, that your ministry gave no indication of any additional funding after the budget. The board knows that you made a promise during the election to increase funding for mental health. The board thought you meant what you said. That's why they wrote to you for the funding. If you don't do anything, these cuts will be devastating to children across the northeast, who, I remind you, are already very fragile because of their mental illness. The board has asked for $436,000. Can you guarantee today that after today's budget that's what they are going to get?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: As the honourable member knows—she was in cabinet—I cannot talk about what's in the budget or what's not in the budget. I can reassure her that we will be looking at all the programs, including the one she mentions today, with respect to funding. This is very serious. All these issues are very close to my heart, given what I did professionally before I came to this place, so I can reassure her that I will look at it very seriously right after the budget today.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Last week you put a moratorium in place on small rural water facilities so they won't have to comply with regulation 170 until December 31 of this year. You also instructed your ministry to review the regulation to, in your words, "examine different ways for smaller systems to meet the drinking water standards in an affordable fashion."

If these facilities need to comply by the end of the year, even though they won't know what they need to comply with until then, they will need to begin the process of engineering reports and upgrades now, regardless of your moratorium. This moratorium seems to serve your purposes more than those of rural churches and halls you claim to protect. Minister, will you make this an effective moratorium by extending the implementation date to six months after your review so it can serve the people instead of your own political purposes?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I find it interesting that today the honourable member has some issue with the announcement that was made last week with regard to regulation 170, a flawed regulation, by the way, that was introduced by the Conservatives when they were government without consulting the partners in the province that it would affect.

Last week, I seem to recall, and I think Hansard would bear me out, the announcement that was made would be most welcome by the people of Ontario and that it was quite appropriate that there would be a moratorium until this government had taken the time to appropriately consult the people who would be impacted. So last week the member said it was great news, and this week he has a problem with it.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Minister, you know as well as I that a six-month moratorium does nothing but prolong the inevitable if there is no money available. Six months from now, we'll still have the same requirement for safe water in our small and rural communities. Six months from now, owners of small, privately run water systems will still be facing the same challenges. The problem is not time; it's cost. It's about time this government made a commitment. Minister, have you budgeted financial assistance for these small water systems?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: I'm very happy to speak to the commitment this government has made with respect to protecting water in Ontario. We are committed to making clean, safe water our priority. We are committed to listening to the concerns of the people of Ontario. We are committed to working with the people in our communities, with municipalities, with the Ontario Medical Association to ensure that the plan we bring forward will meet the needs of the people in the province and enable us to say with confidence that when someone turns on a tap in the province of Ontario, they can be assured that the water is safe. We are going to bring a practical, feasible plan, which is something that regulation 170, which they approved, did not do.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. I was thrilled to be part of last Friday's announcement in Ottawa that a combined $600 million will be spent on building a light rail system from the north to the south of Ottawa, the largest-ever single amount spent on public transit in the city's history. This momentous announcement is good for the environment, the economy and the people of Ottawa, and will help make Ottawa a sus-

tainable city. It is a testament to what can be achieved when all three levels of government work together to get things done.

My question is, will the provincial government continue to work with other levels of government to build a light rail line to service over 80,000 residents in Orléans?

1410

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I was in Ottawa on Friday with Premier McGuinty, Defence Minister Pratt and Mayor Chiarelli to announce the expansion of the Ottawa transit system. I want you to know that this represents the largest intergovernmental investment in infrastructure in the history of the city of Ottawa. I was very pleased to be able to do that. I know all members of this House will be happy.

The transit expansion will provide a better quality of life for the region's residents by helping to reduce gridlock, by controlling urban sprawl and by protecting green space. The city of Ottawa, as part of the initial phase of the light rail project, will carry out an environmental assessment of the east-west section from Orléans to Kanata. The decisions on funding and on construction dates will follow the completion of the environmental assessment.

Mr McNeely: Residents of Orléans and area have 30% of the ridership on public transit when compared to the average of 70% across the city of Ottawa. One reason is a limited number of poor road connections from Orléans that all people depend on. The intersection of Highway 417 and Ottawa 174 is known as "the split." This interchange forces commuters to face extensive delays, and in the last two weeks alone has caused city-wide gridlock. Improving safety at the split and decreasing traffic demand by providing alternative road links to Ottawa South is part of the Queensway east planning study currently being worked on by the Ministry of Transportation. This study will be completed in 2005. Will the minister indicate to me in this House when dollars will be provided to implement the recommendations arising from the Queensway planning study and work to fix the split.

Hon Mr Caplan: The Minister of Transportation.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank my colleague from Ottawa-Orléans first, and I want to assure him that it's not either-or; we are committed to making an investment in public transit as well as in roads. The easterly study is well underway. As the honourable member indicated, it's supposed to be completed in late 2005. Based on those recommendations, we will move forward to see what needs to be done in that area.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Minister of the Environment. Minister, I think you understand that the implementation of Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry is going to cost all water systems stakeholders a lot of money. Recently you announced a deadline extension on regulation 170 for some of the water systems stakeholders.

In my riding of Simcoe North, I have many small municipal residential systems that have fewer than 100 hookups to private residences. The costs of upgrading the systems to regulation 170 are very prohibitive; the citizens simply cannot afford the upgrades.

Minister, will you provide funding to small municipal residential systems, and will you be providing a deadline extension to the municipalities that operate these systems?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): With regard to regulation 170, one of the reasons this government has decided to review the regulation is because the people of Ontario—people in communities, people who run and operate church halls and trailer parks and campgrounds—explained to us that the regulation was prohibitive and it would have required them to perhaps close down their facilities. We heard what they said. We have indicated that we believe we need to improve the regulation so that we can continue to ensure that the quality of the water is safe and that it can be provided in an affordable fashion. That is the undertaking we have given to the people of Ontario. That is the work that is underway now. We look forward over the summer, in the next months, to bringing back a regulation that will do exactly that.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question? The member for Leeds-Grenville.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Supplementary, Mr Speaker.

As usual, the minister avoided the question completely. I understand the quandary the minister finds herself in, because certainly when we suggested applying common sense to these regulations, she was the first one to scream bloody murder with respect to any possible change.

Minister, you talk about being consultative in finding out what communities and others wish to see with respect to the final draft of the regulations. I would ask you about that with respect to the advisory council that you've appointed—people who will recommend the changes you're talking about. It doesn't appear, in any event, to include any rural municipal politicians or leaders who represent rural churches, community halls, legions, small tourist operations, campgrounds or bed-and-breakfast operations. These are the voices that everyone believes should be heard. Why are these groups being excluded from your advisory group?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: If the honourable member were familiar with the Walkerton inquiry report, the honourable member would be aware of the recommendations that speak to the advisory council for drinking water testing and standards. Clearly, O'Connor has told the people of Ontario in this document that we need a cast of scientists and professionals who are familiar

with drinking water standards and the science that is required to ensure that the water quality is all that it can be and should be. Those are the people who are on the advisory council. We make no apologies for the quality or calibre of people whom we have been able to attract to that particular body.

With respect to regulation 170, it is absolutely our intention—I have indicated so in this House—that we will consult with municipalities, campground representatives, trailer park representatives and also with the Ontario Medical Association to ensure that in the end we bring forward a regulation that will work in the province, unlike what that government did.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): My question is directed to the Minister of Health. Last week in this House, you stood in your place and promised the people of Niagara a decision on whether or not they would receive their own ambulance communications service. I've heard from many constituents in Niagara Falls who are concerned about the ambulance communications service and when it will be provided. Can you provide the House with a good-news update on this important service for the people of Niagara?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I would like to thank the member, in fact, all members from Niagara who lobbied hard on behalf of an initiative that is important to the people of Niagara region. On this point, I would say about our government that, as opposed to the hot air delivered on this subject from previous governments, we are going to deliver the cold, hard cash.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to write a letter to Niagara region, and we have approved Niagara region to operate its own ambulance communications service as part of a five-year pilot project to evaluate the effectiveness of that dispatch service as they are evolved to more local areas.

I want to say in particular that it was the hard work and lobbying of the members from Niagara Falls, Stoney Creek and St Catharines that were persuasive on this issue. I think it's also incredibly important to acknowledge the good, hard work of former regional chair Deb Zimmerman.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): Minister, we are delighted that you moved so responsibly to correct a perilous situation created by the former government in Niagara. As you know, the people of Niagara are currently served by the Hamilton central ambulance communications centre. What does it mean for the people who work there?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I think one of the issues that we confront in making a decision like this is that in the Hamilton ambulance centre we've had people there who have been dramatically overworked in trying to provide services to a broad array of Ontarians. As a result, I can say to the honourable member, to the people who work in that environment in Hamilton and to the people of Hamilton and that greater area that there will be no staff dislocation as a result of the announcement we are making today.

1420

CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question to the Minister of Health is about the delisting of important health care services from OHIP.

Judy Trudel from Kapuskasing suffers from intercostal myalgia. It's a condition that weakens her spine and allows her disks to slip easily in and out of place. This condition can only be treated by chiropractic services and not by a standard MD. Judy has been seeing a chiropractor twice a week for four years and will have to remain in his care for the rest of her life, but she can't afford to pay for treatment if your government delists chiropractic services. My question to you is, if you delist chiropractic care from OHIP, what will happen to Judy and the thousands like her who rely on OHIP coverage for their health and well-being?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The member would know well from his long days around here, with respect to the service that he references, that the government of Ontario and OHIP contribution to that is limited to $150 a year. I would say, on this important subject, that I'm not interested in speculating—we'll have our opportunity in the next bit to move forward. But at the end of the day, government is about making priorities and choosing the right priorities. We have a significant challenge to redress some of the experiences Ontarians have had with their health care system. What they'll see from our government today is a strong commitment to a better medicare system to the benefit of the people of Ontario.

Mr Bisson: I've got to tell you, days are going to be a lot longer when it comes to the health care needs she is going to have when you delist those services. You talk about governments having to choose priorities. This woman has no choice. She has a medical condition that needs treatment and your government is going to delist it. How can you look at yourself in the mirror in the morning when you know that people like her are going to be without services that affect their ability to go through their daily lives?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'd say to the honourable member that I have no difficulty looking at myself in the mirror any morning, because I realize I get prettier by the day. I'm playing. This is a serious subject; I don't mean to make light.

I say to the honourable member that every single day we are forced to make difficult decisions. The difficult decisions we are making are on the basis of providing a better-quality health care system to Ontarians. With respect to the service the member was specifically asking about, I remind him that the government his party led in

this province was involved in some of those tough decisions too. At the end of the day, we will send a very strong message about the priorities we're working around in Ontario, things like the wait-time challenges the Premier spoke about earlier and our commitment to drive more care to the community level in the form of family health teams that will offer comprehensive care, which could very well include the services you've referenced in your question.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Premier. Gas prices are over the top, and they continue to rise each and every day. People and businesses in Ontario can't afford the huge increases. Yesterday, your Minister of Tourism said in this House that your Minister of Energy is "monitoring this matter carefully and is prepared to take whatever action he deems appropriate at the appropriate time." Premier, how high will you let gas prices climb before your government, and I reiterate, "takes whatever action" it "deems appropriate"?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Energy.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): We are very concerned about the price of gasoline. The impact of rising gasoline prices on our economy is very serious. Quite apart from the distress it causes drivers, the potential impacts of the price rises affect every sector of our economy. This government is watching carefully, and we intend to continue to monitor this situation to ensure that we are able to deal with this problem, which is affecting most of the western world.

Mr Tascona: Premier, the time is now and the solution you are looking for is right here before the House. It is Bill 48, my private member's bill, the gas pricing freeze act. Will you stand up today and make a commitment to all the suffering businesses and taxpayers who are being gouged at the pump as a result of the outrageous price of gas, pass my Bill 48 and do the right thing for the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr Duncan: Let me tell you what his government did when they were in office. They would like to forget the last eight years, but we won't forget the last eight years, and certainly people who use gasoline. They appointed the gas busters, and Mr O'Toole was one of those gas busters. They did a report and that report made 14 recommendations. They implemented one of them, and that involved consultation. Now let me tell you what the gas busters said:

"We believe, however, that the heart of the solution to high and volatile gas prices lies in a more competitive marketplace. Only the federal government has the jurisdiction"—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. It's my jurisdiction. It's a new question now.

SPORT FISHING

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a question for the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. As the May long weekend approaches and Ontario's anglers emerge for the summer fishing season, many of my constituents are wondering where they can turn to for information on their favourite sport. As the Minister of Tourism and Recreation, what are you doing to ensure that anglers from across the province and around the world are made aware of the world-class opportunities available to them here in Ontario?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Excellent question, and I happen to have a response that I think the member will like. I'm pleased to announce that the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp has entered into a contractual agreement for 2004-05 with four leading angling television companies to promote Ontario. These four companies—Real Fishing, Going Fishing TV, Fish'n Canada and Canadian Sportfishing—will produce a number of Ontario angling content shows in which celebrities will have the opportunity to promote Ontario's competitive edge in angling, the regional location of the lake on which the show is taking place, as well as specific details of the local fishing tactics that the viewer can use to catch fish.

This is great news for the angling community in Ontario as they prepare to enjoy another wonderful summer season.

Mr Brown: I'm pleased that we are doing everything we can to promote angling in the province of Ontario. This would appear to be an area that provides a merger between the two aspects of your portfolio: tourism and recreation. Aside from these valuable television programs, what else is this government doing to ensure that those communities that enjoy the sport of fishing will also reap the benefits of tourism dollars generated by visiting anglers?

Hon Mr Bradley: My ministry recognizes the importance of angling as a sport and as a tourism industry. That is why the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp has developed an aggressive angling promotional campaign to attract visitors to Ontario. The Ontario angling shows will each contain one 30-second commercial that will focus on topics central to fishing in this great province. At the conclusion of each commercial, the viewer will be provided with a Web site and a 1-800 number that will provide more information on angling in Ontario.

CONSERVATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. As you know, the general government committee has had a series of deputations on Bill 27, the greenbelt legislation, and several very clear themes have emerged. One important and compelling theme has been if you save the farmer, the farmer will help save the land. We've heard that theme from groups as diverse as the Ontario Tender Fruit Producers'

Marketing Board, the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and environmental groups like Earthroots and PALS.

Last Thursday, your Greenbelt Task Force called upon you to create a provincial task force on agriculture in support of the greenbelt. How will you commit to helping farmers achieve viability on farms affected by the greenbelt legislation in particular, and what will you announce before the general government committee reports back to the Legislature?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): The legislative committee that's looking into the greenbelt commission has had some very extensive hearings. They've heard from a wide variety of individuals. They realize full well, as does the Greenbelt Task Force, that the agricultural component of the greenbelt is extremely important.

As has been indicated over and over again, we want to make sure that agriculture remains a viable institution within the greenbelt area. In everything the committee will do and everything the Greenbelt Task Force will do, one of its prime aims is to make sure that happens. I can give that guarantee to this member and the House in general.

1430

Mr Hudak: I appreciate the minister's answer. All members of the committee agree that if we can help save the farmer, the farmer will help save the land.

I think it's important now for us to move forward with details, because farmers are wondering how you're going to help them manage the viability of their farms. One suggestion is a task force. Your own greenbelt advisory committee has recommended that. We certainly heard that from many of those committees. I'd like to know if you'll commit at this time to forming that task force before the committee reports back to the Legislature.

Secondly, municipalities like Lincoln, Hampton and Clarington are concerned that if their boundaries are boxed in and if they don't have the opportunity to create jobs for the local citizens, how then can they afford increases in infrastructure, in benefits like local roads, water and sewer? What also will you do for municipalities, in addition to local farmers?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: First of all, the Greenbelt Task Force has been looking at certain criteria by which the definition of the ultimate greenbelt can be measured; that's number one. Agriculture is an extremely important component of that. That has been recognized throughout the entire hearings.

Obviously, once the Greenbelt Task Force has issued its report, which we hope to have by the end of June, we will then try to implement that, in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture. I can tell you, this Minister of Agriculture has had a tremendous interest in what's going on in the greenbelt and the discussions that are taking place, because he is assured, as I am, as Minister of Municipal Affairs, that we want to make sure that agriculture remains viable within the greenbelt area. That's one of the reasons why the Greenbelt Task Force and the greenbelt act were put in place in the first place.

ROAD AND BOATING SAFETY

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Honourable Monte Kwinter. This week, May 17 to May 24, marks Canada Road Safety Week, and includes the Victoria Day long weekend. Unfortunately, sir, such long weekends are notorious for an increase in incidents of drunk driving. To their credit, Labatt and Molson breweries, both of which I am proud to have in my riding, wage campaigns annually on the responsible use of alcohol. Minister, what steps is the government of Ontario taking to ensure that roads are safe this weekend from impaired drivers?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member from Etobicoke North for his question. You should know that Ontario roads are among the safest in North America. Having said that, we have a situation that occurs every year. Coming up, we've got Canada Road Safety Week. We've got the long weekend, the first long weekend of the summer. Notwithstanding all the work we do, both in conjunction with the Ministry of Transportation and my ministry, we still have people who somehow or other think it's acceptable to drink and drive. When they do that, they put themselves and others at risk.

We contribute $1.2 million a year to the RIDE program to make sure that we try to identify those people who are at risk because of alcohol abuse. We have implemented many other programs, educational programs, stiffer fines—all of these things to ensure that what should be a pleasurable weekend doesn't turn into a disaster for citizens of this province.

Mr Qaadri: Thank you for the outline and summary of the government's initiatives. But we must remember that roadways are not the only place where impaired drivers are found. For example, over 40% of powerboating fatalities have alcohol as a factor. In fact, National Safe Boating Week begins this Saturday. Minister Kwinter, what are the province's police forces doing to remind Ontarians that drinking and boating are a dangerous combination?

Hon Mr Kwinter: Again the member from Etobicoke North has raised a very important issue. We have a situation where people who use boats as a recreational facility somehow or other think they don't have the same dangers and problems that drivers have when they drink. As a result, the OPP patrols 95% of the waterways in Ontario. They have a RIDE program similar to the program we have for automobiles. Notwithstanding that, in 2003 we had seven fatalities that were alcohol related and over 1,200 alcohol-related charges, a direct result of people driving boats under the influence of alcohol.

As a former chairman of the Toronto Harbour Commission and as a boater myself, I want to tell the people of Ontario that boating is supposed to be a recreational facility where they and their children can enjoy the beautiful physical attributes of Ontario. To have it marred

by people who abuse alcohol is really unacceptable, and we are doing whatever we can to stamp it out.

SENIOR CITIZENS' HOUSING

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Health. Patricia Gardens is a supportive housing complex in Dryden. Since August 2003, there has been an ongoing labour dispute because the workers there believe the board's strategy to try to reduce supportive services is not in the best interests of the residents. They know that with minimal supervision and intervention, the residents are able to live independently. Without that, many of those residents would be forced into long-term-care beds. In Dryden there are already 122 people on a waiting list for long-term-care beds, so those people who are going to need support are going to end up in an acute care bed in the hospital.

Minister, will you direct your staff to intervene at Patricia Gardens so that those important housing services will be maintained?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I appreciate the question from the honourable member. I'm going to take the word "intervene" out, because there's a labour issue there, and I'm going to make this commitment to the honourable member: I spoke to the local MPP about this subject. I have put a request in to the ministry to get back to me with an options report. I don't have that on my desk yet. But on the central issue at hand here, which is making sure we enhance, and don't allow to be diminished, the supply of supportive housing environments in that community, I assure her and the local community that that is the resolution we are working toward.

Ms Martel: The local MPP did raise this with you, but I want to raise a broader question, because I'm certain that Dryden isn't the only community with supportive housing units and I'm certain that local boards in many other communities are making the same decision to cut those kinds of services, which will force seniors into long-term-care beds.

There was no announcement of funding for supportive housing services in your more general announcement regarding long-term care. So can you tell me if the funding to support these types of services will be made from that allocation, and if not, where will the money come from to support seniors who want to be independent and live in supportive housing?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm not in a position to say as much on this subject as I might in a day or so—it was never intended to be lumped in with long-term care. But on the central issue of the independence of our seniors, I think we're all in agreement that the longer people can have that independence before the step of arriving in a long-term-care facility is a priority for all of us. It's on that basis that we are pursuing this policy across Ontario, and I can assure the member that as these situations crop up, where we've got existing supports in place that are at risk of being diminished or removed altogether, it will be our position to work very hard to hold on to what we've already got in communities and to look for other opportunities for expansion over time.

SEX OFFENDERS

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Minister of Community Safety. Sixteen years ago, 11-year-old Christopher Stephenson was murdered by a sexual predator on statutory release, a federal prisoner. As you know, there was an inquest into Christopher's death that led to many positive changes and many positive initiatives at both the federal and provincial levels, including the establishment of Ontario's sex offender registry.

We now know of three young men murdered in Mississauga. The accused was a sexual predator, Douglas Moore. With respect to the last missing young man, René Charlebois, 15 years of age, whose body has now been found, would you consider—and as the minister you have the authority to do so—calling for an inquest into Rene's death?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member, who was a former minister, would know that a minister has never in the history of this province called for an inquest or directed the office of the chief coroner to conduct that. There's no question that I have the authority to do it, but I also have confidence that the professionals, the chief coroner and his staff, have the ability to determine when an inquest is necessary. I say to him that I am not at this stage prepared to be the first ever to call for an inquest and to override the authority of the chief coroner.

1440

Mr Runciman: Knowing the chief coroner quite well, I don't think he would be offended. Hopefully, and if nothing else, this question and the minister's response will encourage him to take a look at this situation, because there are certainly a great many questions surrounding Mr Moore's presence in Mississauga: the fact that the community was not informed of his presence; the fact that he lived across from a school; the fact that he was mixing with teens, and that he was babysitting.

For a variety of reasons, there was never a dangerous offender application pursued with this individual. There is a whole series of questions surrounding this case which call out for an inquest, which could lead to many positive changes in terms of improving public safety, and make some sense, I suggest, out of the deaths of these three young men which could perhaps preclude the murder of a young man in the future by a sexual predator in Ontario.

I encourage the minister to give this very careful consideration.

Hon Mr Kwinter: I'm sure the member knows that the chief coroner is investigating that particular incident. After his investigation is complete, he will make the determination as to whether there should be an inquest. If he determines that there should be, then of course it will happen. If he determines that there is no cause to have it,

then I will accept his recommendation because, as I said, he is a professional. He is the person I have confidence in, and it's up to him to make that determination.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): My question is for the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. Mississauga West constituents tell me of their frustration in obtaining services and information from government. In years past, I shared in this frustration myself when, as a business person, I tried to obtain these services.

Consumers frequently have to go to two or more government offices to obtain documents and services. Small businesses complain of having to provide registration information multiple times in order to receive basic government services. Surely this administrative burden on businesses and individuals can be streamlined.

Minister, what is the ministry doing to help Ontarians receive basic government services more easily?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Last Thursday, I was delighted, on behalf of the Premier, to be in Brockville, where we signed an historic agreement with the federal government. For the first time, the federal government and the province of Ontario will be co-operating in a series of agreements to better deliver services to the public through a joint public service delivery program.

I want to pay special tribute to the honourable member from Kitchener Centre, John Milloy, who is the parliamentary assistant to the Premier. He did a lot of very good work in terms of getting to the agreement so we can provide the kind of level of service to the constituents regardless of what level they're working toward, whether it's the provincial, municipal or federal level, to create a one-stop shopping environment so that individuals don't have to take a civics lesson to figure out who is in charge of what.

Mr Delaney: Minister, different levels of government provide many services that consumers and businesses use. For example, a small restaurant might need a liquor licence, which they obtain from the provincial government, but then has to line up at city hall to obtain a visitor parking permit. The same also applies to consumers when they obtain services at the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government.

Minister, what can be done to integrate service delivery among the three levels of government?

Hon Mr Watson: The reality is that for too many years under the previous regime there was so much finger pointing and buck-passing that they did not realize it is in the best interests of all taxpayers in Ontario to work together so that perhaps we can see one day in the not-too-distant future when individuals can go into a city hall, perhaps, and apply for an application for a building permit, or perhaps they can get a provincial or federal document all under the auspices of serving the people.

It's not about turf protection; it's about making sure that the individuals have unfettered access to those government services in an efficient fashion. We're working with the federal government, we're working with our municipal partners to create a new era of co-operation in the province of Ontario.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): To the Minister of the Environment: This is the time of year when people are picking up sticks and branches and pruning trees. What percentage of Toronto-area garbage, garbage that's exported to Michigan, contains yard waste?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I'm always surprised when I get a question like that from the—

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Any environment question from a Tory.

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: Well, yes. As my colleague the Minister of Tourism said, we're always surprised when we get questions about the environment from the opposition, because they certainly weren't particularly interested in the environment when they were the government.

In any case, for the information of the honourable member, municipal solid waste is a responsibility of municipalities. Quite frankly, I don't have that figure, nor do I know the percentage of recyclables in the waste stream of the city of Kingston, even my own municipality of Tweed, because it is not a provincial responsibility; it is a responsibility of municipalities. I have great faith that municipalities are going to work with this government to assist us to meet our 60% diversion goal.

Mr Barrett: Thank you, Minister. We can work together. We will get an answer to that question, the reason being, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality has found that more than 25% of the waste being imported from Ontario into Michigan contains yard waste: twigs and branches and leaves and bark.

Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow is very concerned about the import of the Asian long-horned beetle in Toronto garbage and in this yard waste to Michigan. Minister, with the threats of a US border closure to Toronto trash, including trash with yard waste, these threats are growing every day. Have you spoken with Senator Stabenow about this? Second, what steps have you taken to ensure that Toronto's garbage is not exporting the Asian long-horned beetle to Michigan?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: I've had the opportunity to speak with Mayor David Miller, who would say to me that the city of Toronto is confident that it will be able to continue to meet the new regulations that have been put in place by the state of Michigan.

I have also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from Michigan to talk about environmental policies: air policies, water policies and waste management policies. Those representatives were very encouraged to hear that there is finally a government in this province that is looking to improve the framework to

assist municipalities so that they can manage their municipal solid waste issues more easily and in a more timely way.

So I've had some very good interaction with representatives from the city of Toronto and representatives from the state of Michigan, and I believe that Toronto and Michigan will continue to have a very good business relationship.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I just want to take a moment to recognize Terrence Young, former member from Halton Centre in the 36th Parliament, and another former member, Hugh O'Neil from Quinte in the 32nd to 35th Parliaments. Welcome.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have 8,000 more signatures today, bringing my total to 30,000 from the schedule 5 physiotherapy clinic clients. This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas seniors and other qualified patients require the continued provision of physiotherapy services through schedule 5 clinics to promote recovery from medical conditions and continued mobility and good health;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The patients of schedule 5 physiotherapy clinics request the continued support of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for provision of OHIP-covered physiotherapy treatment to qualified seniors and others in need of these vital health care procedures."

This has my signature in support as well.

1450

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas auto insurance rates continue to skyrocket, contrary to the official position of the Liberal government and the insurance industry; and

"Whereas more and more drivers are being cut off by their insurance companies for no valid reason and are being dumped into the Facility Association; and

"Whereas all attempts to regulate the auto insurance industry have failed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Ontario government immediately introduce legislation that would bring to Ontario a public, not-for-profit automobile insurance program similar to the ones currently in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia."

Signed by thousands, and I've signed it as well.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the parliamentary tradition in Ontario of presenting annual budgets in the House of the Legislative Assembly has existed for decades; and

"Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly criticized the actions of the Conservative government and is now running ... for the federal Liberal Party; and

"Whereas the budget should be beyond reproach and should not be presented by a member of the executive council who has any perceived or real conflict;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the budget is not read by a finance minister that is under investigation by the Ontario Securities Commission, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or any other law enforcement agency."

Holy mackerel, Mr Speaker, and I've signed that.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that's been sent to me by Toula Reppas and Judy Gelman of the Schedule Five Physiotherapy Association, which reads as follows:

"Whereas seniors and other qualified patients require the continued provision of physiotherapy services through schedule 5 clinics to promote recovery from medical conditions and continued mobility and good health;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The patients of schedule 5 physiotherapy clinics request the continued support of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for provision of OHIP-covered physiotherapy treatment to qualified seniors and others in need of these vital health care procedures."

This petition has been signed by 9,000 Ontario residents. I agree with the petitioners. I support them entirely.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition and it's quite timely as it refers to today's budget. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the parliamentary tradition in Ontario of presenting annual budgets in the House of the Legislative Assembly has existed for decades; and

"Whereas the previous government in 2003 showed disrespect for our public institutions and the people of

Ontario by presenting a budget inside a private, for-profit auto parts factory; and

"Whereas the Dalton McGuinty government and the current Minister of Finance will be presenting the 2004 budget inside the Legislature on May 18, 2004;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to uphold parliamentary tradition and hold a public presentation and debate of the 2004 budget, and every budget thereafter, by our publicly elected members of Parliament inside the legislative chamber."

I agree with the petition and affix my signature to it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the numbers of Ontario citizens requiring long-term care is increasing and the funding of that care is inadequate;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) to examine the long-term-care situation in the province with an eye to commit to improvements;

"(2) to increase the budgetary portfolio for long-term-care facilities, especially in the areas of nursing care and dietary requirements; and

"(3) to safeguard the very people who elected you from increases in long-term-care accommodation rates, thereby allowing the citizens of Ontario to age gracefully and with dignity and integrity under your careful watch."

I've affixed my signature as well.

PRIMARY CARE

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Peterborough is suffering a crisis in terms of accessibility to health care, brought on by the severe and growing shortage of family physicians; and

"Whereas the community of Peterborough has demonstrated extraordinary strong local leadership in developing a proposal for primary care reform which is very innovative and will provide access to primary care for the growing list of more than 20,000 residents in our community without a family physician; and

"Whereas this proposal has been endorsed by the county of Peterborough, the city of Peterborough, the Peterborough County Medical Society, the Peterborough Community Care Access Centre, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre and the Peterborough County-City Health Unit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work with representatives of the local community to ensure that all residents of Peterborough have access to an appropriate primary care provider through the timely implementation of the proposed integrated primary care model, as this model provides appropriate and equitable compensation for family physicians while incorporating sufficient interdisciplinary health care providers, community linkages and appropriate administrative, infrastructure and information technology supports to enable health professionals to enjoy a more realistic, healthy work-life balance."

I'll affix my signature to this.

RETAIL SALES TAX

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's my pleasure to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the sale of used furniture and household wares by charities is currently subject to provincial retail sales tax under the Retail Sales Tax Act; and

"Whereas the collection of RST on used goods sold by charities places an additional burden on the charities collecting the tax and increases the price of the product" to the consumer; "and

"Whereas the collection of RST under these circumstances amounts to double taxation because owners of the donated goods have already paid the original retail sales tax; and

"Whereas the federal government does not require charities to pay goods and services tax (GST) on used items donated to charities for resale;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request the Ontario Legislature to take immediate action to remove the RST from used furniture, housewares and all used goods donated for resale to charitable organizations."

I am pleased to sign this in support of those people working to help the most vulnerable, and present it to Sameer.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the parliamentary tradition in Ontario of presenting annual budgets in the House of the Legislative Assembly has existed for decades; and

"Whereas the previous government in 2003 showed disrespect for our public institutions and the people of Ontario by presenting a budget inside a private, for-profit auto parts factory; and

"Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly condemned the actions of his own party's government;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to uphold parliamentary tradition and hold a public presentation and debate of the 2004 budget, and every budget thereafter, by our publicly elected members of Parliament inside the legislative chamber."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature thereto.

LIQUOR CONTROL BOARD OF ONTARIO

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from constituents in Parry Sound-Muskoka, "Ontarians Against LCBO Privatization":

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) collects over $1 billion in taxes to support a wide range of important government social programs, services and capital projects; and

"Whereas the LCBO operates nearly 600 stores across the province, offering products from around the world; and

"Whereas the LCBO and its employees provide professional, courteous service;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That Dalton McGuinty abandon his plan to privatize the Liquor Control Board of Ontario."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

TFO

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): J'ai une pétition qui contient plus de 200 noms provenant des citoyens et citoyennes d'Ottawa et de Vanier.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario:

« Attendu que TFO est la seule télévision qui diffuse pleinement, à partir de l'Ontario, des émissions en français qui s'adressent spécifiquement à la collectivité francophone;

« Attendu que TFO reflète la réalisation de nos communautés en milieu minoritaire;

« Attendu que TFO nous informe dans notre langue;

« Attendu que TFO est un outil pédagogique unique en Ontario;

« Attendu que TFO fournit aux écoles de langue française une importante partie du matériel dont elles ont besoin pour leur enseignement;

« Attendu que TFO est trop précieuse pour être sacrifiée au déficit provincial;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de ne pas privatiser notre télévision publique ontarienne et de ne pas en réduire le budget. »

J'y ajoute ma signature avec plaisir.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): This petition is timely, given that we are within an hour of hearing the budget. It's titled "We Reject Tobacco Tax Hikes and a Smoke-Free Ontario."

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty has stated that he will increase tobacco taxes by $10 a carton, force store owners to hide tobacco products behind a curtain, and support a smoke-free Ontario; and

"Whereas history has proven that increases in tobacco taxes cause increases in the" underground "trade for illegal black-market tobacco whose contents are neither regulated nor inspected; and

"Whereas forcing store owners to hide their tobacco displays unduly punishes both store owners and consumers for the" transition "of what remains a legal product;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario reject the tobacco tax hike, reject the smoke-free Ontario, reject the ban on tobacco displays and protect the rights of consumers to purchase a legal, regulated product."

1500

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): This is a petition that is written to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the parliamentary tradition in Ontario of presenting annual budgets in the House of the Legislative Assembly has existed for decades; and

"Whereas the previous government in 2003 showed disrespect for our public institutions and the people of Ontario by presenting a budget inside a private, for-profit auto parts factory; and

"Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly condemned the actions of his own party's government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to uphold parliamentary tradition and hold a public presentation and debate of the 2004 budget, and every budget thereafter, by our publicly elected members of Parliament inside the legislative chamber."

I sign my name to this petition.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to present a petition on physiotherapy. It reads as follows:

"Whereas seniors and other qualified patients require the continued provision of physiotherapy services through schedule 5 clinics to promote recovery from medical conditions and continued mobility and good health;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The patients of schedule 5 physiotherapy clinics request the continued support of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for provision of OHIP-covered physiotherapy treatment to qualified seniors and others in need of these vital health care procedures" from Niagara.

I affix my signature in support.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the parliamentary tradition in Ontario of presenting annual budgets in the House of the Legislative Assembly has existed for decades; and

"Whereas the previous government in 2003 showed disrespect for our public institutions and the people of Ontario by presenting a budget inside a private, for-profit auto parts factory; and

"Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly condemned the actions of his own party's government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to uphold parliamentary tradition and hold a public presentation and debate of the 2004 budget, and every budget thereafter, by our publicly elected members of Parliament inside the legislative chamber."

I'll affix my name to this petition.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Instead of talking about where this budget's being read, maybe we can petition about clean water.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill at site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

"Whereas the county of Simcoe has received, over a period of time, the necessary approvals from the Ministry of the Environment to design and construct a landfill at site 41; and

"Whereas, as part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of site 41 identified over 200 recommendations for improvements to the design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has indicated her intention to introduce legislation on water source protection, which is a final and key recommendation to be implemented under Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has announced expert panels that will make recommendations to the minister on water source protection legislation; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment will now be responsible for policing nutrient management; and

"Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario. We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of site 41 and the nearby water sources."

I'm pleased to sign my name to that.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That's the end of the petitions.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to suspend proceedings until 4 pm.

The Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

The proceedings are therefore suspended until 4 pm. The bells will then ring for five minutes to recall the members.

The House suspended proceedings from 1504 to 1600.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2004 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2004

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I move—

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Before the minister gives his presentation, may I warn the members in the galleries not to partake in the applause and allow the Minister of Finance to give his presentation.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I move, seconded by Mr McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm quite sure that all members of Parliament know that decorum is one of the things that we would respect and would allow for the proceedings.

Mr Sorbara, seconded by Mr McGuinty, has moved that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government. I would ask now the indulgence of the House to allow the pages to distribute the packages.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Mr Speaker, 14 years ago, my friend and colleague Bob Nixon rose in this chamber to deliver a budget. He was, until today, the last Liberal finance minister to do so. And so it is with tremendous pride that I stand as the Minister of Finance in Premier Dalton McGuinty's new Liberal government to present a budget that sets out a comprehensive four-year plan: a plan for growth, a plan for prosperity, a plan for better health care and a plan for better education for our kids.

Notre plan favorisera la croissance, la prospérité, l'amélioration des services de santé et une meilleure éducation pour nos enfants.

On October 2, the people of this province voted for change. Today this government is delivering the plan for change.

Mr Speaker, the problems that we inherited are well known: a large fiscal deficit, deterioration of core public services, overcrowded classrooms and crumbling

schools, a shortage of doctors and nurses, cities and towns struggling to meet and deliver basic community needs and services, and a steady decline in Ontario's infrastructure. These deficits, sir, are not our legacy, but they are our responsibility, and we're assuming our responsibility. And in that regard, we are assuming our responsibility to be prudent managers of the public purse.

We cancelled the private school tax credit so we could invest in public schools. We cancelled a tax credit for some seniors so that we could improve services for all seniors. We said no to irresponsible tax cuts for some so that we could assume our responsibility to provide public services for all.

We introduced legislation to ban the waste of taxpayers' dollars on partisan political advertising, and to give the Provincial Auditor the power to examine not just government ministries, but also hospitals, school boards, colleges and universities.

This government said no to a pay hike for MPPs, and with this budget, this government accepts a pay cut for cabinet ministers.

Our plan flat-lines or reduces the operating budget of some 15 ministries so that we can provide historic new investments in Ontarians' most important priorities: health care and education.

Au cours des derniers mois, nous avons mené dans toute la province de vastes consultations au sujet de l'avenir de l'Ontario. Les citoyens se sont exprimés clairement et avec passion.

Over the past many months, sir, we consulted extensively with the people of Ontario. They spoke to us with clarity and passion. They spoke about the need to transform health care. They spoke about the importance of education. They spoke about building stronger communities. They spoke about helping Ontario's most vulnerable. They spoke to us about a plan that would lay the foundation for economic sustainability and growth.

1610

In this budget we speak and we respond to the people about their aspirations. It is a budget by Ontarians, about Ontarians, for Ontarians. It is rooted in a fundamentally different approach. For the first time, a government of Ontario is presenting a detailed four-year fiscal plan.

It's a plan to balance the budget and return the province to financial health. It's a plan to invest in health and education to produce concrete results. It's a plan to include better access to primary health care, shorter waiting times for critical services and smaller class sizes. It's a plan to foster economic growth and innovation through investments in education, training, health and infrastructure.

But every budget is about choices. We had to make two very important choices that were especially difficult. The first is to increase revenues, and the second is to balance the budget over a number of years.

They were choices that were inconsistent with our election commitments, and we openly acknowledge that. However, it would simply not have been possible to deliver a balanced budget this year without destabilizing vital public services and perhaps even the economy itself. Such an approach would have been irresponsible, and we rejected it.

Likewise, none of us can afford to believe any longer that the problems in our health care system, from ever longer waiting times, to the lack of family doctors, to deteriorating long-term care—none of these can be solved without additional revenue. And so, to shorten wait times, to provide more doctors and nurses, to deliver results for patients, we are proposing an Ontario health premium. The premium would be based on income, and it would be dedicated entirely to health.

Our plan is clear: It is to make Ontario a leader in economic growth, with vital public services and a higher quality of life. This plan calls for a responsible mix of investment, revenue generation, cost cutting and economic growth. It calls for some difficult choices. We've made them, because they are the right choices.

I'd like to speak about health care.

We live in a province that has been a leader in publicly funded health care in the past, and we need to be leaders again. On the national stage, our Premier has been demonstrating tremendous leadership, working toward a new national health care deal.

But I say to you that the health care needs of our people cannot wait. So we've been diligent in developing a four-year plan for better health care throughout the province. It will shorten wait times, it will focus on patients' needs, it will increase the number of doctors and nurses, it will deliver results and it will have the resources it needs to do this work.

In that regard, I am announcing today that by 2007-08, we will provide an additional 36,000 heart procedures per year. We will provide an additional 2,300 joint replacements each year. Beginning next year, we will be funding nine new MRI and CT sites, and an additional 9,000 cataract surgeries per year.

I want to talk about primary care. In study after study, year after year, we have been told that change in health care begins with change in primary care. We're going to provide that change by creating family health teams: doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners working alongside other health care professionals, providing the best in round-the-clock health care.

For 2004-05, we'll invest more than $600 million to reform and support primary health care in Ontario. Over the next four years, we will establish 150 family health teams around the province. The 54 existing community health centres will receive an additional $14 million this year, and we will expand the number of centres over the course of our mandate. Our investment in primary care this year will ensure care for up to 167,000 Ontarians who today cannot find a doctor.

I want to talk about home care. In his landmark report on Canada's health care system, Roy Romanow called home care the next essential service. We agree that home care is a critical component of our health care system. Our plan will provide home care for an additional 95,700 Ontarians by the end of our mandate. It will provide

compassionate end-of-life care to another 6,000 Ontarians in their homes by 2007-08. This expansion of home care will require an additional investment of $88 million this year, and that will rise to $448 million over the course of our mandate.

Our seniors have made a unique investment in this province. So when they can no longer stay in their homes, they deserve long-term care that is the best care. We will ensure the safety and the dignity of our seniors with an additional investment of some $406 million in long-term-care facilities, growing to $546 million by 2007-08. This is going to dramatically improve the quality of care for thousands of Ontarians already in long-term-care facilities. As my colleague the wonderful George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, announced last week, we will hire 2,000 new staff, including 600 nurses, in our effort to improve long-term care. As well, in 2004-05, we'll open an additional 3,760 long-term-care beds.

Too many Ontarians suffer from mental health problems, and far too many of them suffer alone. Our four-year plan provides community-based mental health services to an additional 78,600 Ontarians.

A word about hospitals: While improving community care, we know there will always be a need for high-quality care provided in a hospital. Our hospitals have asked for multi-year funding so that they can plan for the long-term needs of their communities. They will receive increases that average 3.4% between 2003-04 and 2007-08. By putting more resources into community and home care, and by focusing more on prevention, we will enable our hospitals to focus more on those with acute needs.

1620

Like most health care systems, ours is much better at treating illnesses than preventing them. We want to shift the focus to healthy living and illness prevention. This is the very best way to lower the cost curves in health care.

We will provide free vaccinations to children for chicken pox, meningitis and pneumonia. We will introduce legislation that will make all workplaces and public places in this province smoke-free by 2007.

We know there are illnesses we must prevent. And in the wake of SARS and West Nile disease, we know as well that there may well be other diseases out there that we haven't heard of yet. Therefore, our investment in public health will increase immediately to $273 million this year, and that will grow to $469 million by 2007-08.

Today public health costs are equally shared between the province and the municipalities. Our plan increases the province's share of public health funding to 75% by 2007-08.

We will be acting, as well, to ensure we have the doctors and nurses we need. By 2007-08, the number of assessment and training positions for international medical graduates will double. So will the number of clinical education spaces for nurse practitioners. Over the next four years, we will create 8,000 new full-time nursing positions. To protect nurses on the job today from injury, we will purchase 12,000 bed lifts for hospitals and long-term-care facilities in this very year. But most importantly, we will treat our nurses and all health care practitioners with respect.

These initiatives signal a substantial reorientation of health care toward a patient-focused, results-driven system that is sustainable. There will be more hospital beds available sooner for important procedures because more patients will be treated in home and community care. Changing the system will shorten wait times. So will the investments I have announced for those procedures Ontarians want and need the most: more doctors and nurses, better primary care, shorter wait times. That adds up to a healthier Ontario, but getting there won't be easy.

Today 45% of the province's program spending goes to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. For the past five years, health care budgets in Ontario have grown by an average of 8% per year. We must begin to bring these costs under control. To improve cancer care, cardiac care, home care and long-term care, we have had to delist less critical services. Beginning this fall, the province will no longer cover the cost of routine optometry examinations, except for seniors and Ontarians under the age of 20. We will no longer cover chiropractic and physiotherapy services, although seniors will continue to receive physiotherapy through home care and long-term-care facilities. These were not easy choices, but we believe they are the responsible choices.

Et, monsieur le Président, le choix le plus difficile mais le plus responsable est de demander aux Ontariennes et Ontariens de payer une contribution-santé.

Mr Speaker, the most difficult, and most responsible, choice is to ask Ontarians to pay the Ontario health premium.

Sir, you know, I know and we know that this is something we promised not to do.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): You've lied. You've lied. Call a referendum.

The Speaker: Order. I'm going to ask the member from Nepean-Carleton to control his language.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Mr Speaker, as I said, you know and I know that this is something we promised not to do. But in the context of the deficit, to keep our promise to improve health care, to serve a growing and aging population, when wait times are too long and the pressure on public health is greater than ever, it is the right thing to do. It's the fairest way to fund the necessary investments we need.

The premium would be based on income. People with the lowest incomes would pay nothing at all. Our highest earners would pay $900 a month.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): A year.

Hon Mr Sorbara: That's $900 a year. Thank you for that correction. That tax almost got very big indeed.

A family with two children and a combined income of $60,000 would pay $50 per month.

Mr Baird: Shame. Shame on you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I say to my friend from Nepean-Carleton, he is embarrassing himself, his party and this Parliament.

Mr Baird: At least I don't lie.

Hon Mr Sorbara: That does represent—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I have warned the member from Nepean-Carleton, and he insists on using a word that he knows is unparliamentary. I'm going to have to name the member, and those who would like to go could also go.

Mr Baird was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Hon Mr Sorbara: As I was saying, a family with two children and a combined income of $60,000 would pay about $50 a month.

That does represent an additional cost for Ontario families, who work hard to make ends meet. We do not minimize that in the least. But when we weighed it against the greater burden caused by longer waits for cardiac care or cancer care, the endless search for a family doctor and the incredible burden that would be placed on our children if we do not act today to make medicare sustainable, the choice was clear.

1630

Ontarians would begin to pay the premium on July 1. For this fiscal year, it would generate $1.6 billion. That would partially offset the $2.4-billion increase that we're spending on health in this year. In short, every single cent from this premium will be invested in health care. Every cent of this premium will be used to provide better results in our health care system.

When Ontarians chose change, they certainly had public education in mind. Today, too many of our sons and daughters are struggling to succeed in school, and far too many are dropping out of high school or failing to continue their education in a college or university, a job placement or an apprenticeship program. We don't consider that remotely acceptable. The budget that I am presenting today includes historic new investments in education within our four-year plan. These investments are being directed with one overriding result in mind, and that is better student achievement.

Judging from the results of province-wide tests given in grades 3 and 6, only about half of our students are meeting the provincial standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Our plan for public education sets a very ambitious new standard, moving to 75% in our first mandate. How are we going to get there? We'll start with smaller class sizes in the all-important early years. We'll phase in a cap of 20 children per class from junior kindergarten to grade 3 over the first four years of our mandate.

Smaller class sizes will translate into more teachers. I'm announcing today that we are providing funding for training spaces for 1,000 additional new teachers in 2005-06. We will place a lead teacher in literacy and one for numeracy in every elementary school in the province to encourage the use of effective teaching technology. This will require the training of 4,000 new lead teachers, and that will double to 8,000 the number of specialists trained in best practices.

We will establish a literacy and numeracy secretariat to ensure that schools, teachers and most importantly, students, get the supports they need when they need them. We will send turnaround teams of experts into struggling schools, increasing from 42 to more than 100 the number of schools that receive this extra support.

We'll be investing substantially in school repairs, in textbooks and in other resources. My colleague Gerard Kennedy, the Minister of Education, will be making more detailed announcements of these initiatives in the very near future, but the Premier has three new Rs for education in Ontario. The first is results, and we're going to deliver those results. The second is respect; our partners in education deserve nothing less. The third is responsibility, and I'm referring to our responsibility as a government to provide the necessary resources to achieve better results. That's why we will be investing an additional $2.1 billion over the next four years in our schools and their students.

By 2007-08, we will have increased per student funding by more than $1,100. Over the course of the next four years, our plan will make public education in Ontario the best education, helping our students to achieve their true potential. We believe this is the most important thing that we can do to ensure Ontario achieves its full potential.

The strength of our province depends on the strength of our communities, from our smallest rural communities to our biggest cities. Never before have our municipalities faced so many challenges, from gridlock to the soaring cost of public health. Our four-year plan will help them meet these challenges, improving the quality of life for Ontarians wherever they live.

I want to start with the gas tax, sir. Starting in October of this year, we will begin to deliver on our commitment to make two cents of the existing provincial gas tax available for public transit. We're going to begin this October with one cent, increasing to 1.5 cents in October 2005, and to the full two cents in October 2006.

Our biggest cities play a critical role in our economy, and no city plays a bigger role in our shared prosperity than Toronto. That's why Premier McGuinty recently signed an historic agreement with the government of Canada and the city of Toronto to invest more than $1 billion in transit expansion and renewal over the course of the next five years. That includes an environmental assessment for a possible new subway line to York University.

This government is also proud to be working with the federal government and the greater Toronto area municipalities to invest $1 billion in improving GO Transit.

We will introduce legislation later this year to create the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, and that would ensure a more seamless transportation system right across this area.

We've already announced plans with the federal government and the city of Ottawa to provide a total of $600 million in support of the O-Train in Ottawa.

Nous avons annoncé un projet conjoint avec le gouvernement fédéral et la ville d'Ottawa qui signifiera un investissement total de 600 $ millions dans le service O-Train à Ottawa.

As well, we have announced plans with the federal government and the region of Waterloo for a light rapid transit project in that area.

This year, we will release the first-ever growth management plan for the Golden Horseshoe. It is designed to encourage development that makes sense while stopping sprawl that cannot be sustained in our area. The Premier will soon announce a provincial facilitator to assist the industry and stakeholders on issues that arise as we implement this growth management plan.

As well, I have already mentioned that we are increasing the province's share of public health from 50% to 75% over the course of the next three years, and that will involve uploading $127 million from the budgets of municipalities to our own budget.

Premier McGuinty has asked my colleague John Gerretsen, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to build on these initiatives through a dialogue with municipalities, taking into account their various needs and capacities. What will emerge is a new and even stronger partnership, one that will provide municipalities with the tools that they need to give Ontarians the quality of life they deserve.

We must never forget the men and women who work Ontario's farms, who spend their days producing much of the food that feeds us and helps fuel our economy.

1640

Late last year, we signed an agreement with the federal government to implement the agricultural policy framework, securing long-term funding to help Ontario's farmers.

Last month, my colleague Steve Peters, the Minister of Agriculture and Food, announced an exemption from the land transfer tax for farmers who transfer ownership between members of the same family. This removes an obstacle to passing on the family farm from generation to generation. This tradition has been a vital part of this province's heritage.

As well, we will be introducing legislation to simplify the process for farmers to obtain retail sales tax exemptions on farm-related supplies and equipment.

To improve food safety and to boost business and consumer confidence, we have hired 118 meat inspectors and commissioned a review of the province's meat inspection system.

I am also announcing today that this government will provide farmers with $20 million over the next two years to help them implement the first phase of our nutrient management initiative.

Finally, our government will consult with rural residents and stakeholders to better understand the unique priorities of rural communities across the province. We have a responsibility to make the changes that are needed to ensure that these communities enjoy improved prosperity, environmental well-being and a greater quality of life.

Ours is a vast province, and 90% of that province is northern Ontario. My northern caucus colleagues are fond of reminding me that it is the top 90%. Unfortunately, the extraordinary potential of the north remains largely untapped.

Our government is committed to enacting a northern prosperity program. It will help northern communities attract and retain important investment and jobs.

We will move forward this year to establish a northern Ontario grow bonds program that would help new and expanding businesses in northern communities.

But I am particularly excited about our Go North initiative. It is designed to market the north's inherent strengths across the continent and around the world.

Je suis particulièrement enthousiaste à l'égard de notre initiative InvestiNord-Go, qui fera mieux connaître les forces inhérentes de la région sous le continent et dans le monde entier.

Finally, recognizing the importance of maintaining tax support for northern resource companies, we propose not to parallel federal changes to the resource allowance.

Northern Ontario is a region of boundless potential. The people who live there ask no more than to be given the opportunity to realize that potential. Our government will help make that happen.

I want to tell you that during the course of our prebudget consultations, Ontarians sent us some very compelling messages. One of the most compelling was this: Whatever challenges the province faces, we must not forget the challenges faced by Ontarians who are most vulnerable. I heard that message loud and clear. It was a message that was also heard by every single member of this Liberal caucus. Today, I am pleased to make an overdue announcement.

Social assistance recipients will receive an additional $106 million annually. This will reflect a 3% increase in the basic allowance and maximum shelter allowance for recipients of the Ontario disability support program and Ontario Works. My colleague Sandra Pupatello, the Minister of Community and Social Services, is going to be providing details of this increase in the very near future, but I want to say that this is the first increase for these vulnerable people in the last 11 years.

I am also announcing that social assistance benefits will not be reduced this year to take into account the federal government's July 1 increase in the national child benefit supplement. This will mean that this fiscal year there will be an extra $7 million for parents who need it the most.

Housing is a basic human need, and the need is greatest among those who are most vulnerable. We will work with the federal government and municipalities to increase the number of affordable housing units in Ontario. We will put particular focus on appropriate housing for persons suffering from mental illness, victims of domestic violence and the working poor.

We've already committed $8 million in support for victims of domestic violence, and $28 million over the next three years will be provided to create new housing spaces for people with developmental disabilities.

I am announcing today an additional $25 million for children's mental health programs for this fiscal year, and

that will be growing to $38 million in 2005-06. This funding will help an additional 7,000 children every year.

Children's treatment centres help parents obtain and coordinate a range of services for children with disabilities. A $24-million capital investment over four years will allow them to better focus on this critically important work.

The government is also certainly committed to giving children in Ontario the best possible start in life by increasing the quality and the quantity of child care in Ontario. I am announcing today that we will work with our municipal partners to create an additional 4,000 subsidized daycare spaces in the province.

I would like to speak about our seniors. Thousands of Ontario seniors struggle to make ends meet, particularly those who live on fixed incomes with no easy way to adjust to even a small increase in the cost of living. Well, we're going to help. We're providing an increase in the property tax credit for seniors with low and moderate incomes by $125. This is the first increase for those seniors since 1992.

None of the results we hope to achieve in this budget will be possible unless we lay the foundation for new economic growth in Ontario. This is the primary objective of every budget. Our goals are very lofty indeed. We are determined to make Ontario the North American leader in economic growth and innovation.

We're going to do that with a fiscal policy agenda designed to eliminate the deficit over our first mandate. We're going to do it with a competitive tax system that provides the revenues necessary to fund sustainable public services. We're going to do it with a well-managed and efficient government. And we're going to do it by revitalizing our infrastructure, rebuilding our electricity sector, and maintaining a very high standard of public services.

1650

Our plans for health care and education are as important to the economy as they are for the men and women and children who benefit directly from them. We don't always think of health care as an economic driver, but I can tell you that our auto manufacturers do. Their labour costs here are 30% lower than those of their competitors south of the border, and it is our public health care system that is a big part of that.

And just as our health care system gives our businesses a competitive advantage, so too does public education give our workers a critical edge.

Notre plan en matière d'éducation publique créera un système qui enseignera à nos enfants les compétences dont ils auront besoin dans un monde où la prospérité et la croissance sont tributaires du savoir.

But building a high-skill, high-wage economy requires more than excellent public schools; it requires higher learning that is second to none. To that end, I am pleased to announce that former Premier Bob Rae has agreed to conduct a comprehensive review of post-secondary education in Ontario. I can still hear his eloquent voice ringing in these halls. His mandate will be to recommend how we can best provide Ontarians with a high-quality, accountable, affordable system of post-secondary education, one that gives Ontarians the opportunity to achieve their full potential, regardless of their income.

But while we await the results of Mr Rae's review, we will push ahead with a number of initiatives to improve our system. We recently announced a two-year freeze on tuitions. I am delighted today to announce that we are providing funding for colleges and universities to make up revenue shortfalls for both of those years. More than 5,000 students will have greater access to student loans because of reforms and because of a $20.9-million enhancement we are making to the Ontario student assistance program.

Our province faces a shortage of workers in skilled trades and other technical occupations. In recognition of the critical role our colleges play in tackling that challenge, I'm announcing today a $20-million fund to update technology and equipment in our colleges, and a $25-million, one-time college stabilization fund, which will be targeted primarily at smaller rural and northern colleges.

It is a fact that about half of our Ontario high school students, whether by choice or by circumstance, do not go on to pursue a post-secondary education. Our government is committed to giving these young people an opportunity to benefit from and contribute to Ontario's economic growth.

It is the apprenticeship system that is key to encouraging growth, as well as providing an important career path for so many young people who choose not to attend college or university. So I am announcing today several initiatives that would increase the number of apprenticeships in the province, helping to ensure we have the skilled workers in the construction, industrial and manufacturing sectors in the years to come.

There will be a new apprenticeship training tax credit which would encourage employers to hire and train apprentices in skilled trades. We will increase funding to classroom training for the apprenticeship program. By 2007-08, 26,000 young people will be entering apprenticeships every year because they had an opportunity to keep learning after leaving school.

There will also be new programs for young people who drop out or are at risk of dropping out of high school.

Every year about 125,000 people arrive from around the world to make Ontario their home. They enrich our province both culturally and economically. Indeed, Ontario was built on immigration; and you know, sir, that without it, our economy would grind to a halt. We owe it to new Ontarians and we owe it to ourselves to speed up their integration into our workforce.

As I mentioned earlier, we are more than doubling the number of assessment and training positions for international medical school graduates. But we will also start to tear down the barriers that immigrants face trying to enter their trades and their professions. We are going to introduce close to $10 million this year, and it will grow to $12.5 million in 2005-06, to improve foreign-trained workers' access to the jobs they are trained to perform.

The strongest societies and the strongest economies are rooted in modern, reliable, efficient and affordable infrastructure. Almost every area of business and government activity is dependent to some extent on infrastructure. Infrastructure provides the foundation, literally and figuratively, for cities that are liveable, water that is drinkable and power that's reliable.

But Ontario's infrastructure foundation has been eroding. We face a serious deficit in this regard. That is why we created the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. This year, we will invest about $3.3 billion in improvements to Ontario's infrastructure. At the same time, my colleague David Caplan, the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, is developing a 10-year infrastructure plan, and it will establish our investment priorities for the 21st century.

I am also announcing today that we are supporting that plan by creating the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority, as well as infrastructure renewal bonds. I should tell you that the authority will provide affordable financing to meet municipal, health, education, post-secondary and housing priorities. Funding for the authority and its loan program will come from the sale of the infrastructure renewal bonds. We're going to invite the federal government to affirm its commitment to infrastructure renewal by joining us in that new initiative.

But we're already moving ahead with our innovative policies in key infrastructure areas. I have mentioned the historic investment in transit—a commitment that will be expanded on in announcements over the course of the next several months.

At the same time, we are investing nearly $1 billion this year to keep our roads safe—and to support the movement of goods on which our economy depends.

As my colleague Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of the Environment, has reminded this House on many occasions, governments have a duty to protect the quality of public drinking water. So we reaffirm our commitment to implementing all of the recommendations of the O'Connor report.

And this year, we will provide more than $400 million to support source-to-tap drinking water initiatives. Most of this funding will be used to help municipalities bring their water treatment facilities up to the world standards that are set out in Ontario's Safe Drinking Water Act.

1700

On energy: You know that our people and our economy depend on safe, affordable and reliable energy and, in particular, electrical energy. The work of rebuilding our electricity sector, which we began within days of taking office, will mark every single day of our mandate.

In June, the Minister of Energy, my colleague Dwight Duncan, will introduce legislation to reform our energy sector. Under that legislation, we would see a combination of regulated and competitive electricity market that would provide more stable prices that reflect the true cost of electricity. We would see the encouragement of new investment. We'll see an aggressive conservation strategy that would make Ontario a leader in energy efficiency. We will see, as well, action to meet the critical need for new supply, and finally, the creation of an independent body, the Ontario Power Authority, to ensure long-term supply of electrical energy.

Job creation is the most important measure of a growing economy. This government understands that small business makes a very big contribution to job creation and the economic growth of the province.

Notre gouvernement est bien conscient du fait que les petites entreprises contribuent de manière importante à la création d'emplois et à la croissance économique en Ontario.

That's why we held the line on small business corporate taxes last year when the corporate income tax rates were raised. We also accelerated the increase in the small business threshold, and we are continuing to exempt the first $400,000 of private sector payroll and all self-employment income from the employer health tax.

I am announcing today that we are moving forward in creating a one-stop Web business portal, a resource that will simplify registration and change-of-business information for small business.

To better meet the needs of small businesses, we will meet our commitment to convert the Red Tape Commission into a small business agency.

Finally, we are supporting Ontario's domestic film industry by proposing to parallel the federal government's 2003 film tax credit changes.

This budget contains two new initiatives affecting business, positive changes that will make us more competitive and promote investment.

First, we're proposing to eliminate Ontario's capital tax. That tax, one that businesses must pay whether or not they're profitable, is, in effect, a tax on investment and job creation. This change would be phased in starting January 1, 2005, and it would mean that in 2005, some 6,000 more businesses would no longer pay capital tax. By 2012, this tax would be completely eliminated.

Second, we are proposing to change capital tax allowances to allow faster write-offs on computer and data network infrastructure equipment. This is a measure that would parallel changes introduced in the federal budget, and it's good news for business.

When we consulted Ontarians, they told us they wanted a government that would be accountable and transparent and well-managed. That is why we've based this budget on a prudent four-year plan. It's the result of some six months of rigorous review of every ministry in the government. The directive to each ministry was clear: Programs are to be designed to meet Ontario's priorities, and they must yield measurable results.

In the fall, we will be releasing four-year results-based spending plans for every single ministry. Going forward, our government will report at least twice a year on the progress being made toward meeting our plan.

All of this is part of a new approach. It's called budgeting for results. It means that we will be judged by the results we deliver to the people of Ontario, because they know, and we understand as well, that increased spending alone doesn't guarantee better results. That's

why we will be constantly reviewing the programs we fund against the results they deliver.

If a given program doesn't reflect the priority of Ontarians, delivering satisfactory results for the money being spent, we will either find a better way to do it or we'll stop doing it altogether. And we will be reporting regularly on our progress toward achieving those expected results.

Achieving better results from public services will require a transformation in how we deliver these services. The transformation will require some investment upfront. For example, community-based health care will require an investment in new technologies and facilities.

To that end, our government is establishing a $1-billion change fund. We asked all ministries to submit proposals for ways in which the fund could be used to implement one-time changes that will increase efficiency and ensure sustainability. Most of these plans have been approved and form part of this budget. The remainder will be assessed in the coming months. Only projects with a sound business case to reduce long-term costs and mitigate the demand for services over the long term will be funded. Any money that is not spent this year will be used to pay down the deficit.

The clear focus of our plan, reflecting the priority of Ontarians, is health care and education. In order to ensure that we can fund these core services while balancing our budget, we have to hold the line on other spending. Between 2004-05 and 2007-08, we will restrict program spending to an average growth rate of just under 1.9 per cent per year. This is less than the rate of growth of our revenues and less than the rate of growth of the economy. Over the same period, the budgets of 15 ministries will either be flat-lined or they will decrease.

As of tomorrow, my colleague Gerry Phillips, the Chair of Management Board, will begin the process of finding further savings and efficiencies across all our ministries. He has clear targets: $200 million in 2005-06; $400 million in 2006-07; and $750 million in 2007-08.

This budget also proposes to eliminate several tax expenditures coming out of our review of the effectiveness of these measures. In addition, we are raising certain fees and charges across a range of services to ensure that they better reflect the true cost of delivering those services.

We are also increasing revenues from tobacco taxes as of midnight tonight, and alcohol levies as of January 1 of this year—I'm sorry, June 21. Let's get the date right. I want to repeat that: alcohol levies will go up as of June 21 of this year.

Our four-year plan is based on a prudent, realistic economic forecast. Ontario's economy is expected to gain momentum over the course of the next few years, continuing to rebound from last year's slowdown. The growth rate will bring with it strong job creation and higher incomes. We're predicting that the economy will grow by 2.3 per cent in 2004, and an average of 3.3 per cent annually from 2005 to 2007.

The private sector consensus forecast is even more optimistic, calling for a faster rate of growth and predicting that by 2005, Ontario will have one of the strongest economies in the advanced industrialized world. We're being somewhat more cautious in our assumptions, not because we are less optimistic but because we carry an important responsibility to the people of Ontario. We have to be certain that our four-year plan is based on assumptions that are realistic and achievable.

1710

Helped by a growing economy and a skilled labour force, Ontario is expected to create some 104,000 jobs in 2004. This is an increase of 1.7% over last year. Over the course of the next four years, the unemployment rate is projected to fall from 7% in 2003 to 5.9% in 2007. Personal incomes are expected to increase by 3.4% this year and will continue to reflect economic growth, rising by 4.5% in 2005, 4.8% in 2006 and 4.9% in 2007.

It's within this context of steady economic growth and prudent management that we've laid out our plan for steady deficit reduction.

In short, the government of Ontario must balance its books. However, trying to force a balanced budget in the short term would require deep spending cuts, and those would threaten the very viability of basic public services.

By transforming services and by holding program spending growth to less than the rate of growth in tax revenues, we will eliminate Ontario's structural deficit without putting our priorities and the priorities of the people of Ontario at risk.

Based on our prudent assumptions, and after enacting the measures I am outlining in this budget, we project a deficit in 2004-05 of $2.2 billion, down from $6.2 billion in 2003-04. This includes a one-time elimination of the liability from power purchase contracts entered into by the old Ontario Hydro. Those costs would be included in consumer bills over the life of those contracts.

As we continue to work through our four-year plan, the deficit will be reduced to $2.1 billion in 2005-06 and $1.5 billion in 2006-07. Ontario's books will be balanced in 2007-08.

In doing that budget, we have provided for very substantial reserves: in this year, a reserve of $1 billion, and in each of the next three years, a reserve of $1.5 billion.

Over the course of our four-year plan, the accumulated deficit as a percentage of GDP is projected to decrease steadily, from 25.3% in 2003-04 to 21.9% in 2007-08.

In the months leading up to the budget, there has been ample and colourful speculation about the sale of public assets. The advice I have received has certainly been helpful. I want to take this opportunity to make the policy of this government crystal clear: We will not sell assets in order to pay for the ongoing operations of government. We will not use asset sales to hide deficits. What we are going to do is bring the highest of standards to the strategic management of all our public assets. We're going to undertake a thorough review of major provincial assets to evaluate the appropriate role of each asset and to ensure effective and efficient management. That will include a review of the LCBO. Our purpose will be to determine if Ontarians are receiving the maximum benefit from this very significant crown asset. But let me be clear: We will not sell the LCBO, we will not sell

TVOntario, to pay down the ongoing operations of government. We are not looking to sell anything.

It is possible that our review may identify assets that are not providing enough ongoing value to Ontarians but would, if sold, generate substantial revenues that could be used to increase efficiencies and promote economic growth. In that case, we would explore a potential sale on the basis that those revenues generated would be used for our change fund.

In 1999, the previous Parliament passed the Balanced Budget Act. It is an act with laudable objectives but mechanics that are seriously flawed. It does not prevent a government from hiding a deficit from voters.

I am introducing a replacement: the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act. If passed, the FTAA would set a more responsible framework and would require an independent review of government books before an election. It will enhance, I believe, both the quality and the credibility of our democracy. We will also be proposing legislation to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act in order to allow the revenue measures contained in this budget.

Under the terms of the FTAA, there would be no penalty for running a deficit beyond that which the people of Ontario might choose to impose on election day. However, the law as it currently stands does impose a fine of more than $9,000, to be paid by all cabinet ministers in any government that runs a deficit. As I have made clear, we have chosen to run a deficit in the short term because it is the right thing to do. We stand by that decision, and we will pay the fine this year, beginning on June 1. The money will be used to pay down the deficit.

As I conclude, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the many people who have helped make this plan a reality. I want to thank the Premier for his inspiration and his direction. I want to thank my parliamentary assistant, Mike Colle. I want to thank my cabinet colleagues. I want to thank the men and women of Ontario's public service and particularly my deputy minister, Colin Andersen, and the hard-working staff at the Ministry of Finance. I want to tell you, sir, I have never seen such hard work.

I want to thank my own family. In particular, I want to thank my wife, Kate, who joins us in the Speaker's gallery. Every one of us who has a partner knows the tensions that arise when one member of the partnership takes on a major project like helping to create an Ontario budget. I want to thank her for her patience. More importantly, you should know that in the 35 years we have lived together, if any good has come from the work that I do, it is really her spirit working through this flesh and blood, and I thank her for that.

1720

Most of all, I want to thank the people of Ontario for their advice, for their commitment to one another and to this province. Je veux remercier les Ontariennes et Ontariens pour leurs conseils, leur engagement les uns envers les autres et leur engagement envers l'Ontario.

We're a Liberal government. Nous sommes un gouvernement libéral. As Liberals, we understand that society comes together around a core set of needs and goals. It is through government that those goals are reflected, and it is with the help of government that those needs are met. In meeting those needs, we create a civil society.

The people in Ontario told us that what they need is fundamental change. Today, I have laid out a four-year plan to deliver that change.

In education, the people of Ontario will be able to look to smaller class sizes and increased student achievement. There will be more doctors and nurses in this province. Waiting times will be reduced. There will be more focus on high-quality, around-the-clock, community-based health care. Our roads and highways will be in better shape, and improved public transit in urban areas will have reduced gridlock.

Four years from now, Ontario's public services will be sustainable. Four years from now, the people of Ontario will be able to judge our plan based on the results that it has achieved. I have every confidence—je suis tout à fait confiant—that they will agree that this plan for change is the right plan for Ontario.

Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I move adjournment of the debate, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Mr Runciman has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I ask for leave to revert to introduction of bills, and in so doing, I move that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to—

The Speaker: We'll call the order first. Introduction of bills?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Mr Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures / Projet de loi 83, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

FISCAL TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE ET LA RESPONSABILITÉ FINANCIÈRES

Mr Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to provide for fiscal transparency and accountability / Projet de loi 84, Loi prévoyant la transparence et la responsabilité financières.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1726.

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Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

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Greffier
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 19 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 19 mai 2004

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HEALTH CARE

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Provincial Liberals have betrayed us, not only with their regressive two-tier health tax—remember the McGuinty promise of no new taxes?—but also with their regressive two-tier delisting of vital health services. OHIP will no longer pay for working families to visit optometrists, chiropractors or physiotherapists as of this fall. This is a brazen and blatant betrayal. Optometrists, chiropractors, physiotherapists and their patients have been brutally betrayed by a Liberal government that has turned its back on preventative eye care and has sentenced people to live with back and muscular pain if they can't afford access to health. I believe that's called two-tier health care.

Clearly this flies in the face of promoting preventative community-based primary health care services, and this is a bald-faced betrayal. These health professionals and their patients question why this government, a government supposedly committed to universally accessible health care, would now bring in this regressive two-tier privatization of eye care, chiropractic and physio services. They wonder how it could be that this government would ask them to pay more for health through tax premiums and yet receive fewer services. We know the health minister declares war. He has now laid down the gauntlet on optometrists, chiropractors, physiotherapists and their patients. Who's next?

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I rise today to inform the House that after yesterday's budget announcement, I spoke with my sister, Anna Johnston. Anna works for the Rouge Valley Health System as a medical lab technologist. Since 1995, she has seen a steady deterioration of the health care system in terms of the quality of service, employee morale and patient satisfaction.

Anna and I believe that yesterday's budget announcement represents a watershed in addressing the number one priority for Ontarians. Yesterday's announcement for health care is long overdue. Patients welcome the change. Anna and her colleagues welcome the change in the way that government deals with health care in Ontario. They welcome 36,000 more heart procedures, nine new MRI and CT scans, 8,000 full-time jobs for nurses, and home care for over 95,000 Ontarians.

Our government's commitment to improving health care will mean better delivery of primary care, long-term care, cancer care and home care to patients. Health care workers like my sister Anna, who's a bit older than I, but I won't give her age, and other thousands of nurses and nurse practitioners are deeply satisfied. These improvements will enhance employee morale and patient satisfaction. All this will mean overall improvement to health care, Ontario's number one priority.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): When I saw the smirk on Dalton McGuinty's face last night, when he spoke about his broken-promises budget, I was reminded of that Jim Carey and Jennifer Tilly film, Liar Liar. You might remember from that film that it had a tag line beneath lead actor Carey's smug, grinning picture that said—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Order. Let us not start that. Would you mind withdrawing that? It's an indirect way of trying to do something. Could you withdraw that comment.

Mr Hudak: I'll withdraw the title of the film. The plot, as everybody knows, is about an fast-talking attorney and habitual Pinocchio. Does it sound familiar? If they made a sequel to that film, no doubt about it, the main character could easily be played by Dalton McGuinty. While that Carey movie was a harmless comedy, the damage Dalton McGuinty has wrought upon working-class Ontarians—

The Speaker: Order. I'm sorry, but would your colleague mind putting away those props?

Mr Hudak: The damage Dalton McGuinty has wrought from his broken promises are far more dangerous, and potentially catastrophic, to middle-class families in Ontario. I cannot imagine a working family in Port Colborne or Dunnville being able to swallow what amounts to a $1,200 per home tax from the 50 tax hikes and fee increases in this budget, which is absolutely merciless.

MARKHAM DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): Today I rise to acknowledge Markham District High School's 50th anniversary reunion. Over the past weekend I had the opportunity to attend some of the high school celebra-

tions, which drew more than 2,000 former staff and students. The anniversary marks 50 years of the school at its present location, but MDHS has been in existence for 145 years.

Former students and teachers came from across Canada and from far-off places like Holland, Texas, Saudi Arabia, and Australia. Although the majority of participants at the celebrations attended the school in the 1970s and 1980s, the event was open to anyone who had ever attended the school. One very special guest was 98-year-old Faye Hoover Reesor. She attended Markham District High School in the early 1920s, making her the oldest former MDHS student at the reunion.

The many festivities, planned by a 12-member committee, spanned the course of three days and included a golf tournament, a pub night at designated pubs for each decade, a staff brunch, a variety show, nostalgia rooms, a dinner and dance at the Markham Fairgrounds and an ecumenical church service. Judging by the overwhelming number of attendees, the reunion was a huge success, and one that reconnected old friends and teachers. Congratulations to Markham District High School on its successful 50th-anniversary reunion.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I just wanted to review briefly the budget funding announcements they have made for education. I want to say that yes, they have announced $400 million in increases for salaries, maintenance, building repairs, school renewal and all ongoing operations. I would add that that's similar to the increase that was projected in the 2003 budget by the Tories. Yes, they added $250 million in new funding to implement a cap on class sizes and assist schools in meeting targets for success in province-wide testing. They have done that. Yes, they've added $133 million as a fund to deal with issues of literacy. But I've got to tell you, there was not one cent announced connected to the recommendations made by Dr Mordechai Rozanski—not one cent.

So what do we have? No announcement on the $375 million for maintenance of school buildings and backlog, no announcement on the $675 million in catch-up funding recommended by Dr Rozanski, no announcement of the $20 million in the transportation costs, the $48 million in new funding for English as a second language, the $20 million for special ed in secondary schools, and the approximately $300 million to cover inflationary costs for 2004-05 is pretty well what will be covered by the $400-million announcement. Not one cent for Dr Rozanski in this budget.

1340

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Yesterday this government tabled its first budget, a document which carefully laid out the McGuinty government's commitment to restoring the essential services that have suffered under years of irresponsible tax cuts and chronic underfunding. The Honourable Greg Sorbara presented a clear and comprehensive plan, one that will deliver on the change that Ontarians asked for. It also reinforces our commitment to co-operation rather than confrontation, as was the case with the Harris-Eves government, when dealing with our partners and stakeholders.

One such example is our commitment to municipalities. We promised a new deal for our local partners, and we have delivered. But don't just take my word for it. Just this morning I had the distinct pleasure of meeting with Her Worship Mayor Hazel McCallion at a post-budget breakfast, an opportunity to hear first-hand the reaction of key community stakeholders, including that of Her Worship. She, in her own words, endorses our budget's direction, which has restored funding to essential services. She went on to say, "The citizens are picking up the tab for tax cuts that the previous government made, because you can't cut taxes without cutting services."

There are always tough decisions and choices to be made when balancing the needs and wants of citizens with the very real fiscal constraints that all levels of government are facing. Partisan politics be what they may, Mayor Hazel has spoken.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Since the budget was presented, my office in Lanark-Carleton has been overrun by calls and e-mails from constituents who feel they are under attack by the McGuinty government. They are screaming mad because the Premier has broken the very clear promises he made just seven months ago and adopted the disastrous tax-and-spend approach of Bob Rae's NDP government of the early 1990s.

The bottom line: The budget is all about higher taxes and reduced health care services for working families. Imagine the substantial changes faced by the average working family living in the Ottawa Valley. They are struggling day to day just to get by in the face of skyrocketing gasoline prices, rising hydro rates and increasing auto insurance premiums.

This morning they awoke to headlines informing them they are now faced with a new provincial health tax that will cost hundreds of dollars a year. For example, a family with two kids and a combined income of $60,000 will pay $600 a year under the new health tax. For this family, that's a provincial income tax hike of 26%. What do they get for this new tax? Less service for more dollars. That's right, the Liberal government is collecting more money from you while it delists the basic health care services many residents rely upon. For most Ontarians, OHIP will no longer cover the cost of optometry exams, chiropractic services and physiotherapy services.

Dalton McGuinty pledged to balance the budget, hold the line on taxes and expand health care services, not reduce them.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): This morning, along with the members for Eglinton-Lawrence, St Paul's and York Centre, I had the opportunity to meet with an assortment of constituents and community stakeholders from our central Toronto ridings to talk about yesterday's budget. I am happy to announce that these constituents get it. They understand that our government—

Interjections.

Ms Wynne: Here's what they get: They get that our government is committed to choosing the responsible path. They told us clearly that they appreciate our decision to move forward in a way that will improve their public services while putting our finances in order. One of the things they were most impressed with was our emphasis on community delivery of health care. Our constituents know this new emphasis will bring care closer to them and make that care more affordable for them.

One of my constituents, Peter Yue, executive director of the Flemingdon Health Centre said, "After years of neglect, we are pleased that the government has recognized the important role that community health centres play in the health delivery system and are hopeful that this budget signals the beginning of improved funding for this sector."

That's exactly what we're doing. Yesterday's announcements on funding for community health centres, family heath teams, home care and immunization highlight our recognition of the need to move health care into the community. For my riding, this is very good news.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Yesterday's tabling of the McGuinty Liberals' first budget was a day of emotions. There was bitterness and anger over the betrayal of public trust and the unrepentant admission by the finance minister that centrepiece promises of the Liberal election platform—no tax increases and a balanced budget—were being tossed out like the trash they proved to be.

I experienced those emotions too, but the overriding emotion for me was sadness, sadness that so many of my legislative colleagues were defeated on the basis of false promises, sadness that hard-working men and women in my riding, many of whom voted Liberal, were caught by this deceit and now will pay the penalty.

The average income in my riding of Leeds-Grenville is under $40,000. In Brockville, it's $41,000; in North Grenville, $43,000; in Prescott, $34,000; and in Gananoque, $36,000.

For many of these households, these new taxes add up to about $1,000 a year. This, combined with increased fees on basic services and the delisting of health care services, will make all Ontarians poorer, especially low-income families.

By and large, these are good people who work hard to make ends meet, to stretch a dollar, and now, as a result of this McGuinty Liberal betrayal called a budget, they will have to dig deeper into their pockets to fund a Liberal government that was elected on a platform of falsehoods. We should all feel sad.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 43, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act by requiring signage cautioning pregnant women that the consumption of alcohol while pregnant is the cause of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome / Projet de loi 43, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool en exigeant que soient placées des affiches avertissant les femmes enceintes que la consommation d'alcool pendant la grossesse cause le syndrome d'alcoolisme fœtal,

the title of which is amended to read

"An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act by requiring signage cautioning pregnant women that the consumption of alcohol while pregnant is the cause of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool en exigeant que soient placées des affiches avertissant les femmes enceintes que la consommation d'alcool pendant la grossesse occasionne l'ensemble des troubles causés par l'alcoolisation fœtale."

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated May 19, 2004, of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

CHRIS GARRETT

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Tomorrow is the funeral of Cobourg Police Constable Chris Garrett. I seek unanimous consent of this House that our flags fly at half-mast for the funeral.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent, as requested by the member from Brant? Agreed.

1350

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier, and I refer him to page 70 of yesterday's budget. Would you mind explaining to the people of Ontario, Mr Premier—because your finance officials in the lock-up yesterday, quite frankly, couldn't—how revenue for the province of Ontario is $68,250,000,000 on March 31 and then, when you wake up on April 1 of this past year, the income goes automatically to $78,360,000,000? This is not an April Fool's joke; I wish it were. Can you explain where that extra $10.2 billion is coming from over the space of one day?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I'm sure that the Minister of Finance, upon his arrival shortly, will speak to some of the technical details. But I can tell you this: We are so proud that we are now going to have the ability to make absolutely essential investments in health care.

I'm talking about reducing waiting times in a dramatic way. We're talking about 36,000 cardiac care treatments that we otherwise could not have done; some 9,000 additional cataract surgeries; some 2,300 additional joint replacements. We're hiring 8,000 new full-time nurses, we're creating 150 family health teams, and that is just the beginning.

Mr Eves: That's all very interesting, but it has nothing to do with the $10 billion and where it's coming from. It's quite obvious the Premier is unable to answer the question. Hopefully, the Minister of Finance can, because his officials yesterday weren't able to answer the question.

"Families are already paying for health care with their taxes. Pay more for health care, pay twice for health care, but get less health care—that's the Tory plan. It's certainly not the Liberal plan." Mr Premier, this is your quote from January 25, 2002. What happened yesterday?

Hon Mr McGuinty: We're making some tough choices but I can assure you they are the right choices. Let me tell you what it is that the people of Ontario are going to benefit from as a result of this new premium. And we don't do this lightly. We understand this places a burden on Ontario families. We understand that, but we also understand it is absolutely essential that we start to make upfront investments in our health care system so it'll be there for our families and their children, and their children after that.

I say again, here are some of the things we're going to do with this new premium: 36,000 more cardiac care treatments, 9,000 more cataract surgeries, 2,300 more hip and joint replacements, 8,000 more nurses, 150 more family health teams, nine new MRIs and CTs, 95,700 more Ontarians will receive the home care they need, and the list goes on and on.

Mr Eves: A 3.4% increase for nurses won't hire a single new nurse in Ontario.

"'If at some time in the future we think it's important to raise taxes, I have continuing faith in the collective wisdom of the people of this province and I'll put it before them. We can have a referendum,' Mr McGuinty said." What date is the referendum, Mr Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: We've had the most extensive pre-budget consultation exercise ever in the history of this province. There's a time to listen, there's a time to learn, and there's a time to lead. Now is the time to lead. We're moving forward on health care. We're moving forward on education. We're moving forward on our plan to help our most vulnerable. We're moving forward to ensure that we put this province on a prosperous and sustainable footing when it comes to public services and the economy. We are leading when it comes to the matter of this province.

TAXATION

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Premier, yesterday you did what you promised not to do: You raised taxes on working families, on working men and women. In doing so, Premier, you're breaking the law. That is what families in Nepean-Carleton and across Ontario are saying: You are breaking your word and you are breaking the law.

Before you asked working men and women and families in Ontario to pay more, I have a specific question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Could I get a chance to listen to the member from Nepean-Carleton? A lot of shouting is coming from the other side.

Mr Baird: Before you asked working families in Ontario to pay more in taxes, I have a specific question for you: Did you do anything to get the federal Liberals and Paul Martin to restore the funding cuts implemented since he first became finance minister?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I am not sure what the gist of that question was, but let me say this: Prior to the last election, we put together the most comprehensive financial plan ever put before the Ontario public by any party. We had it approved and endorsed by the chief economist at Scotiabank, a former senior economist for the Bank of Montreal, and a forensic accountant who spent over 70 hours poring over our numbers.

The members opposite said that the budget was balanced. We anticipated a $2-billion deficit. It turns out, sadly, we grossly underestimated. The biggest mistake that we made and that our experts made was to rely on the figures put forward by the previous government. We will make sure that does not happen again. We are going to change the law in Ontario so that at the time of the

next election and every one after that, we'll be very clear, very transparent and very open with respect to the state of our budget.

Mr Baird: Premier, that sounds like the great opening day, the first day of the referendum for Ontario, where they get to decide whether they believe this Liberal drivel. The bottom line is, you are committing highway robbery in Ontario, and Ontario voters know that Paul Martin is driving the getaway car. You see, on Paul Martin's first day as finance minister, the federal government was spending 18 cents on the dollar; 18 cents of every dollar was paid for by the federal government. But when Paul Martin left the finance department, it was down to 11 cents. So I want to ask you, Premier, will you get on the phone and tell Paul Martin to restore the cuts to health care and return health care spending to 18 cents on the dollar immediately? Will you do that, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: You know, and I say this with all sincerity, I wish the member opposite would focus on his responsibilities that have to do with provincial affairs and the responsibilities that come with his having a seat in this Legislature.

Let me say that I was hoping somehow that the debate would be joined today. Let me say this by way of contrast: We are not pretending that we are offering easy leadership to the people of Ontario. We are offering them challenging leadership, and we are challenging them to work together so that we can improve our health care system. We are challenging them to work together so we can make essential investments in our public education system. We are challenging them to do what they know in their heart of hearts is the right thing when it comes to our most vulnerable. That's the kind of leadership that we are bringing to this Legislature and, more importantly, to the people of Ontario.

Mr Baird: Premier, I'll tell you what the official opposition is challenging you on. We're challenging you on your integrity to keep your word to the people of Ontario. You participated in an event on September 11, 2003, where you promised Ontario working families that you would have a referendum before—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr Baird: You promised—

Interjections.

The Speaker: It doesn't mean, when I get up, that as soon as I stop talking, you should start talking. I should only be hearing from one member. The member for Nepean-Carleton, final supplementary.

1400

Mr Baird: We're challenging you to live up to your commitment to the people of Ontario, to conduct a referendum. Premier, it won't cost a dime We could combine it with the federal election, Elections Canada could do it, and it would be free. Premier, if you won't call a referendum and allow Ontario voters their say, they are going to have their say on June 28 when they go to the polls and defeat Paul Martin, the real health care villain in the province of Ontario. Will you call a referendum? Will you give the people of Ontario a real voice, just as you promised to do? I'm challenging you to keep your word.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I hope the member opposite is registered in Ontario as a lobbyist on behalf of his federal counterparts, because apparently he is devoting all of his time and energies to supporting their cause.

When it comes to this budget and our political fortunes, I am hopeful that the people of Ontario will see it the way that we do, and this is the right thing to do for us as well as the next generation. I can tell you one thing: We are looking forward to running at the time of the next election, and running hard, on behalf of our ideas and the people of Ontario, but we will not run away from our responsibility to do the right thing for the people of Ontario as it's framed in this budget.

The Speaker: New question.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. I would like to hear the member from Kenora-Rainy River.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Before the election you said that a health care tax would be a bad idea. I can quote you: "Tory leadership candidates Ernie Eves and Chris Stockwell may want to raise taxes by charging families an additional $1,000 a year for health care. I do not," said Dalton McGuinty. Then we see your budget. Under your budget, a working family where both wage earners make just $49,000 a year is now going to be paying a staggering $1,200 in new taxes. This is clearly an attack on the wallets of modest-income and middle-income working families. Premier, after this, why should any Ontarian believe anything you promise?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): You know, I honestly thought that the leader of the NDP would have been supportive of our efforts to make the essential investments in health care that will serve all the people of Ontario. I honestly thought we would have received his support in that regard.

I have said this, as has the Minister of Finance: We understand that this places a burden on families. This is not an easy thing to do, and it's not a step that we take lightly, but the upside outweighs the negatives. For example, this morning I did an event that had to do with vaccinations. In Ontario at present, we are not funding chickenpox, meningitis vaccinations or pneumococcal disease vaccinations. For a family with a single child, that would be $600 alone for one child. If you have two kids, we are going to pick up the cost now for $1,200. We are doing things in this budget that will greatly advance the interests of Ontario families when it comes to the quality of care they are going to receive.

Mr Hampton: The question was, why should anyone believe Mr McGuinty when before the election he says that there should not be health care taxes, that they are

wrong, and then we see the budget and who does he go after? He goes after low-income families, modest-income families, middle-income families, working families and says to them, "You pay an extra $1,200 a year."

Here is something else Dalton McGuinty said before the election: "Families are already paying for health care with their taxes. Pay more for health care, pay twice for health care, but get less for health care—that's the Tory plan." Now we look at Mr McGuinty's budget. People pay for health care through their taxes. Now they pay the new health care premium. But if you need to go to a chiropractor, that is cut. If you need to go to a physiotherapist, that is cut.

The Speaker: Question.

Mr Hampton: Mr McGuinty, can you tell me a difference between your health care policy and the Conservative health care policy you used to criticize?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite knows that we ran to improve our health care system and that we're making an historic level of investment in our health care system. We're being straight with the people of Ontario: We cannot do this on our own; we need their help to invest in their health care system. We're not apologizing for bringing that kind of leadership to the province of Ontario. We're telling the people of Ontario that we are going to work as hard as we can to improve the quality of the services they will now receive. I'm talking about shorter waits, more nurses, more doctors, and more nurses and doctors working together in family health teams. We're talking about substantial investments in home care and long-term care—that's the kind of thing.

I say to the member opposite that we had a choice to make, there's no doubt about it. We could have cut health care services, we could have fired nurses, we could have shut down hospital beds. We chose to do the opposite, and to that end we're enlisting the people of Ontario in this cause to improve their health care.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Hampton: Premier, you did have a choice to make. Under the Conservatives, individuals with incomes over $100,000 a year got a 35% tax cut. You could have gone to them and said, "Now it's your turn to contribute to health care." Under the Conservatives, the largest corporations got a $600-million tax loophole in the employer health tax. You could have gone to them and said, "You got the tax cuts. Now it's your time to make the contribution to health care." You had a choice. You went after modest- and middle-income working families. Why should they believe any promise you make from now on?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to remind the member opposite that he voted against our legislation to roll back the corporate tax cuts. I want to remind him of that. The NDP simply hasn't evolved when it comes to public policy, to put the kindest spin on it. They continue to believe that the only thing wrong with the province of Ontario is the rich.

When it comes to our health care system, we've made a choice. We've said this health care system belongs to all of us and those who can afford to do so must make a contribution. This is a progressive Ontario health premium. Unlike the other one, it is not a flat tax. It exempts those earning less than $20,000. We think it is transparent, fair and essential, and we're proud of it.

Mr Hampton: Premier, let me tell you just how unbalanced, how unfair, how regressive your new health tax is. Under your new health tax, a millionaire who has an income of $2 million a year will pay $900, but a family where the husband makes $49,000 and the wife makes $49,000 will pay $1,200. That's the kind of tax policy that, when the Conservatives brought it in, you used to shoot up to the ceiling and say, "This is unfair. This is an attack on working families."

Why should any working family in this province believe anything you say any more, when you've gone after them with such a vengeance and left your corporate friends and your high-income friends to enjoy the tax cuts they got under the Conservatives? Why should anyone believe you anymore with your record?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I say the member and I obviously have a different view on this. He thinks that somehow we could just get all the money we need from those earning over $1 million. I have a different approach. I think this health care system belongs to all of us. We're exempting those who earn less than $20,000. We think that is fair. Let's not lose sight of the benefits this will bring to all of us. In the matter of long-term care alone, because of this premium, we'll make an investment that will create another 3,760 beds, seniors will be entitled to at least two baths a week, we'll be hiring 600 more nurses, we'll have more inspections, we'll have an RN on site on a 24/7 basis. All that and so much more is going to be available to us as a result of this premium.

1410

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Premier: Your own budget document shows that you will see increased revenue from federal health transfers and your new health care user fee totalling $2.6 billion. Your health care budget is slated to increase by $2.1 billion. You are half a billion dollars short. Premier, you're breaking two promises. Why are you reneging on your promise to dedicate those funds to health care?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Speaker, the Minister of Finance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): As is typical, my friend gets up in question period and tells half the story. The fact is, we are making increases in the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care of almost $2.2 billion this year. At the same time, the new Ontario health premium will raise, in this year, about $1.6 billion. So the health premium doesn't match this year. But, if he wants the policy, I'll give it to him clearly. I'll repeat what I said yesterday. Every single cent of the Ontario health premium will go to health care. It will help us this

year give services to 167,000 individuals who today do not have a family doctor. It will help provide 3,760 new long-term-care beds. It will, by 2007-08, result in 36,000 new cardiac procedures.

Mr Hudak: Sir, quite frankly, I don't believe a word you say any more. The Premier made two distinct promises. He said increases in transfers from the federal government, the CHST, would go to health care. He promised that every penny from your new user fee would go into health care. This is beside the fact that the Premier, instead of increased health care funding—the patients of chiropractors, physiotherapists and optometrists are paying now out of their own pockets in a bizarre twist to two-tier health care.

I will ask you one more time. You have two clear promises. You are half a billion dollars short this fiscal year. Why are you reneging on your promises to put those two streams into health care?

Hon Mr Sorbara: It simply sounds more like the noise and disrespect that we saw from this party yesterday. I'll give him the figures straight from budget documents delivered yesterday. In total—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I wonder whether he really wants to have an answer. Can we inquire about that?

In this year alone, we will contribute by way of expenditures in the Ministry of Health, in child and youth services, in community and social services, in municipal affairs and in colleges and universities some $2.36 billion in additional expenditures.

But I want to tell him that we are not here just to quote amounts. What's important to us are the results that we'll bring about: better care for our seniors in long-term care, more hope—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. New question.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Mental health, particularly children's mental health, has suffered terribly over the last many years. I've been hearing from many workers in the field. We know you're going to be increasing the funding, but they want to know just how much is coming their way.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): That's a very good question. I'm proud to say that today the McGuinty government has committed to $25 million in this fiscal year for children's mental health. This is the first such increase in 12 years.

I acknowledge that it will take some time to clean up the Tory mess. They did not invest in children's mental health and it will take some time, but we have had round table discussions across the province. This was a huge issue. Children were waiting for years, not months, for assessments. This is a very good start in addressing those needs.

Ms Mossop: It sounds very good, Minister, but the question is, will it be enough? I've heard from the workers in the field that a one-time cash infusion is not going to be enough. They want to know that the money is going to there in the long-term. Can you assure us that the money will be there in the long term?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Indeed, the system has been so denigrated under the former government that $25 million is a start, but next year it will go to $38 million a year. As well, one of the things we have heard from the stakeholders is that it's not only money, but it's the integration of the services: it's working smarter. So we will continue to consult with the psychiatrists, the psychologists, the people working out there, the physicians, to integrate the service. So it's not only more money, but spending it in a smarter way.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, in the budget, you broke probably your two most fundamental promises to the people of Ontario during the election campaign: first of all, that you would not raise taxes, and secondly, that you would balance the budget in the first year. You made another promise during the course of the campaign, which is promise number 14: "We will help our schools develop good citizens through character education."

There are students visiting the Legislature today. I met with students in Whitby this morning. We talked about character issues, the most fundamental issue being broken promises. They asked me, and I ask you, how can it be that a leader seeking office makes solemn, fundamental promises to the people of Ontario, gets elected, and then breaches those promises? Is this your first character lesson, so that—

Interjections.

Mr Flaherty: I can't hear.

Interjection: You're the one who's talking

Mr Flaherty: Because of Ms Pupatello, I cannot hear what I'm saying.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. The member for Whitby-Ajax makes a very good point. I'd also like to hear him, but I think your question has been asked.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I am hopeful that at some point in time, some representative of the party opposite, from the former government, will admit that we find ourselves, as a province, in this mess because of their $6.2-billion deficit. We made a choice.

The member, in his question, made reference to students. I know there are students in the gallery in front of me and likely some behind us. I say this to students, parents, teachers and all those who are committed to public education: Because of the choices we have made,

we are going to hire 1,000 more teachers. We're going to cap class size from JK to grade 3—we'll phase that in—to 20 students per class. We're going to hire thousands of teachers, who are going to act in a lead capacity in our elementary schools so that we can do a better job when it comes to numeracy and literacy. We are committed to public education, and the choices that we've made will enable us to make the necessary investment.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Let me just caution members about using unparliamentary language. Please, I'd like the decorum to be retained.

Mr Flaherty: The question was about character and the example that you are setting for young people in Ontario, the lack of character that you are showing by breaching promises. You had a choice. The difficult choice you had when you were seeking public office was not to make promises that you knew you could not keep. That's an important part of character that I think most parents teach their children in Ontario—and I hope most teachers communicate to children.

But there's another promise that was made that was broken yesterday, about balanced budget legislation and about the Taxpayer Protection Act that you voted for and that you supported. Your Minister of Finance said yesterday that you'll pay the fine for the first year, for breaking the law. Is your second character lesson, then, to the students of Ontario that it's okay to break the law as long as you pay the fine?

Hon Mr McGuinty: First of all, I hope the member does not injure himself falling off his very high horse. Secondly, if the member is so adamant, if he's so insistent that we respect the law, then I am sure that he and his colleagues who served in the cabinet in the previous government are now going to cross the floor and hand us cheques, as a result of delivering a $6.2-billion deficit.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I ask the members to come to order. You're all burning question period.

1420

WATER QUALITY

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Ontarians are very concerned about the integrity of their drinking water. Our world changed dramatically after Walkerton and we have become acutely aware of how important safe drinking water is. Can you tell us what you are doing to ensure that our water is safe to drink?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I'm very happy to have this opportunity to explain to the members of this House, to the people of Ontario, to the students who are here this afternoon that this government places our environment as a priority. That is reflected in our budget plan and in our commitment to support the programs that I spoke to earlier this week. It is our plan. We have announced a white paper on source water protection and we have included resources in the Ministry of the Environment's budget to ensure that we can afford to follow through on that initiative. I've also created an advisory council on drinking water quality, and again, this budget ensures that there are dollars there to make sure that council has the resources it needs to protect water quality for all the people of Ontario.

Mrs Van Bommel: You mentioned plans and programs. Could you tell us what type of funding you have allocated for these programs and how you will ensure that this translates into healthier Ontarians?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: First of all, I'd like to explain that over half the budget of the Ministry of the Environment is dedicated to water protection. I'm also especially pleased to report to this Legislature that the annual budget for the Ministry of the Environment is returning to the level that it was a decade ago, before it was decimated by the Harris-Eves government.

I would also like to inform the House today that through our operating and capital budget, my ministry has committed $158 million to protecting water quality in this province. Also, along with other ministries, we have committed an additional $400 million to support source-to-tap drinking water initiatives. I believe the people of Ontario can be very confident that we are living up to our commitment to protect our environment and ensure that drinking water in Ontario is safe to drink.

HEALTH CARE

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): A question to the Premier: Your decision to cut patient access to health care and privatize health care services is going to cost Ontarians so much more. Low- and modest-income Ontarians can't afford to pay out of pocket for eye exams and for physiotherapy and chiropractic services, and they can't afford to pay for those services out of their own pockets after they are stuck paying your new health tax. Instead, patients who need the services are going to end up in the emergency ward, sicker than ever before, and that's going to cost the whole health care system so much more. My question is, why did you break your promise to Ontarians not to cut health care services or to privatize health care services?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the question, but I disagree with the premise. We are making dramatic investments in and improvements to health care. We had to make some difficult choices along the way, but let's be fair about the characterization here. When it comes to physiotherapy, those who are receiving that through long-term care or home care or those who find themselves on ODSP will continue to receive their physiotherapy benefits.

What we're doing is looking for ways, even within the health care system itself—and the member opposite knows that is not an insured service—to better use that money. What we think is a higher priority within the health care context is waiting times for cardiac care,

cancer care and MRI and CT services. We've made that decision. It's not an easy one, but we think and believe it is the right one.

Ms Martel: Premier, the decision you made was to finance your health care investments on the backs of low- and modest-income working families. That's the decision you made, and you could have made a different decision. You could have rolled back the 35% tax cuts for the rich and famous in Ontario, put in place by the Conservatives. You would have got $1.6 billion from that change. But you're here to protect your wealthy friends, and you're sticking it to low- and modest-income working families through your new health tax hike. You know that modest- and low-income families cannot afford to pay out of their own pockets for eye exams or for chiropractic and physiotherapy care. Why did you break your promise to those low-income families, and why did you break your promise not to privatize health care services?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I reject the premise and the assertions made by my friend opposite. I am working as hard as I can, not only within the province but in the national context, to ensure that medicare can be revitalized and that we continue to support a universally accessible, publicly funded system. I'm working hard on that. So I completely reject the characterization put forward by the member.

What I can do is list again some of the things we are doing for families of all income levels. We're going to ensure that we have 36,000 more cardiac care treatments, 9,000 more cataract surgeries and 2,300 more hip and joint replacements. We're going to hire 8,000 more full-time nurses, establish 150 family health teams and add nine new MRI and CT sites. The list goes on and on, as you well know, Speaker, as a result of earlier references to me today. We are improving health care in a way that it benefits all Ontario families.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. I want to read a headline from Toronto Sun today. It says, "From Fiberals to Bald-faced Liars." That is what—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): You know that those are unparliamentary words. Would you mind withdrawing them?

Mr Klees: I will certainly withdraw that on behalf of the Toronto Sun. They were not my words, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'll give you a moment to withdraw. Let me just say too that many members are lifting up that paper and showing that.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The next time we do that, I will regard that as a demonstration. I would ask you to hand those papers in, in case you are tempted again.

You've got 10 seconds.

1430

Mr Klees: Speaker, I want to apologize on behalf of the Toronto Sun for using that terminology, but the reason it was used is that in this budget this government indeed did what they said they wouldn't do.

Now, to the Premier: In a desperate, cynical and ill-conceived attempt at justifying this budget, the Minister of Finance this morning said on CFRB that if they hadn't done this budget the way it was, he would have had to shut down Sick Kids Hospital and a number of other institutions in this province. Can the Premier justify the Minister of Finance's comments this morning?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'll refer that to the Minister of Finance, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. To the member for Nepean-Carleton passing by with the paper, I think that is showing total disrespect for Parliament.

Minister of Finance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I want to say to my friend from Oak Ridges, for whom I have a great deal of respect, that to misconstrue and misstate what I said this morning on the radio is simply shocking, so I will just tell him what I said.

The point I made was that the previous administration, when we added up all the accounts, left us with a $6.2-billion deficit in the last fiscal year. That's the first point. We have managed in the first year of our budgetary term to reduce that deficit to $2.2 billion.

And I said that I would say to those who propose that we completely eliminate the deficit in this year that in order to do that, if we were to do that, it would be like closing the entire community college system or hospitals like Sick Kids and other—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr Klees: My point is that that is precisely what the Minister of Finance said. It's an all-time low in trying to justify their broken promises to the people of this province. At the very least, if the government deemed it appropriate that they raise taxes when they said they wouldn't, they would at least have kept within the law, not placed themselves above the law, and had a referendum to get a mandate from the people of Ontario to do so. That is the very least. So, Speaker, I want to put the Premier on notice that I will be tabling a private member's bill in the House that will in fact call on the government to have a referendum to put the mandate on the table.

I would ask the Premier this: Will you allow your caucus members to have a free vote on that private member's bill so that they at least can side with the people of Ontario to keep you from raising yourself above the law of this province? Will you do that?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Just before the Minister of Finance, I want to remind the members that if this continues, I will have a recess until you can calm yourselves down with

these demonstrations. Again, I regard this as a total disrespect for Parliament.

Minister of Finance.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Thank you, sir. This hue and cry from my friend from Oak Ridges is really quite outstanding. This comes from a member of a caucus and a government which over the course of the last three years of their mandate, during which Ontario had real, strong economic growth, raised expenditures in Ontario by an average of 22%, and at the same time allowed revenues to deteriorate so that during that period revenues actually went down by 0.06%. They destroyed the revenue base of this province. They drove the province into deficit. They left us with a horrible mess. We have begun, with our budget, to bring this province back to financial health, and we are all very proud of that.

CHILDREN'S NUTRITION

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I've received a number of calls to my office from teachers worried about their students being hungry and not having enough to eat. I'm sure you and everyone else in this House understands that it's pretty tough to learn and get things done on an empty stomach. We have committed a lot to education. Have we committed to helping more children start the day off right by making sure they have a good breakfast?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Indeed, nutrition programs are very important, not only to help children have a good start and learn in their school day, but also to teach them about nutrition. And to that end, we are increasing our annual spending on breakfast programs by $4 million a year, from $4.5 million to $8.5 million a year.

Mr Hoy: Childhood obesity and diabetes rates are at record high levels. Fostering healthier food choices for our children is a priority. Emphasizing healthy eating and physical activity are equally important for optimal health. What steps have you taken to ensure that our children have the nutrition they need to grow and learn?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I believe the Minister of Education would like to answer this.

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): It is very important that this House take its responsibility to make sure that we do everything we can to support parents in their goal to keep their children healthy. We have the first instances of serious disease among young adults in this digital age. It is tougher for them to be able to be active. We are going to have mandatory physical activity back in schools on a daily basis. And, as of this fall, we will be banning junk food in elementary schools to make sure that we have consistency in the hallway corridors with what we are trying to teach in the classrooms and reinforce the tough job that parents have.

Making sure that kids are able to stay healthy is one of our objectives for our province's schools.

AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Premier. After yesterday's budget, I have to say that I'm disappointed in your government's betrayal of Ontario's working farm families. Not only did you just re-announce previous piecemeal legislative changes that require little or no funding or revenue changes, what you did give in nutrient management was just a drop in the bucket of what will be required. But I was even more surprised when I looked at the budget papers to see that the operating budget for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food has been reduced by $128 million.

Premier, how can you say that you are on the side of working farm family when you remove $128 million from the OMAF budget to serve your urban agenda? Is this just another time when you are breaking the promise to Ontario's farmers?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'll send this to the minister.

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I can't believe the nerve of that member to stand up—he talks about broken promises. In 1995, his government came to power and said "No cuts to agriculture." What was one of the first things they did? You cut millions and millions of dollars out of the agricultural industry. You closed offices all across this province.

I think the honourable member, as a former minister, should understand that there are a number of programs; programs change on an annual basis. The healthy futures program that had been implemented by the previous government has run out. There was over $80 million in BSE funding that was included in that budgetary program. As well, round two of the agricultural policy framework transition money—those dollars are no longer in the budget.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member for Nepean-Carleton. You keep shouting across the floor. I'm going to warn you one more time about that. The member for Oxford.

Mr Hardeman: Premier, on December 9, 1999, your agriculture critic, now the minister, stood in this House and said, "Last week the government betrayed the province's farmers.... They have slashed $8 million from the OMAFRA budget." Eight million in administrative savings is something I think we can all agree can be done with little effect on the daily life of our family farms.

In your election platform you stated that you would make OMAFRA a lead ministry in the Liberal government. Can you tell me how slashing $128 million—that's over 20% of the budget—doesn't betray farmers? I think it does. How does slashing 20% of the budget show your support for this ministry and working farms, as you promised you would do?

1440

Hon Mr Peters: Obviously, the member wasn't listening. We made a commitment. We hired 118 meat inspectors in this province. We followed through. Who

fired those meat inspectors? They did. Who made the commitment to help family farms in this province to transfer farm to farm, intergenerationally? We did. Who's bringing forward legislation to help the agricultural community have better access, to use their agricultural membership card at the point of purchase? We're going to do that. Who brought forward $20 million to help meet the nutrient management requirements? We did. We signed the agricultural policy framework, which is going to bring $119 million annually—reconfirmed in this budget. Who's going to assist farmers with $173 million in transition funding? We are. This is a government that is committed to agriculture.

SPORTS AND RECREATION FUNDING

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): My question is to the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. Sports and recreation are important in maintaining a healthy population and vibrant community. Experts estimate that 57% of Ontarians over the age of 12 are not physically active enough, even though the health benefits of physical activity, such as reduced risks for heart disease and cancer, and extended longevity, are many.

Physical inactivity costs our health care system and our society dearly. Experts estimate that physical inactivity and obesity cost about $3.5 billion in direct and indirect health-related costs, not to mention the health problems experienced by individuals and their families.

Encouraging Ontarians to get out and enjoy all that Ontario has to offer is one way of helping them get active and healthy. Minister, what is your ministry doing to promote recreation, sports and physical activities in Ontario?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): To provide greater access to recreation activities, the ministry has provided over $2.2 million in recreation development grants that assisted communities across the province to organize recreation and sporting events.

For example, the ministry has provided funding to Parks and Recreation Ontario to enhance the physical activity of several target groups where physical activity is typically low or there are barriers to participation. Some $40,000 was provided to the city of Ottawa—my friend Norm Sterling will be happy about that—for a project to increase access to recreation programs for children between the ages of five and 14 with complex special needs. They are but two examples of how this government is working with our community partners to ensure that there are many more sport and recreation activities available at the grassroots level, the positive health results of which will be seen, I believe, in the years to come.

Mr Racco: The mayor of Mammola, who is here with us today, will know what physical activity means in his municipality. Minister, we need to encourage our kids to get active from a young age. There are so many sports and activities out there, from baseball and soccer to gymnastics and dance. Or, what could be more Canadian than hockey and lacrosse?

In my riding of Thornhill, and particularly on Racco Parkway, we have soccer, baseball, a cricket field, every sport you can think of. The question is, what are you doing specifically to encourage youth to become physically active and engage in a healthy lifestyle such as Racco Parkway provides?

Hon Mr Bradley: I have a note on that. That is why my ministry has provided over $1.1 million to the community sport opportunity fund to get our kids out in the fields, courts and ball diamonds across the province.

This fund has been used to increase the number of children and youth participating in sports, recreation and leisure activities, for instance, in Elgin county. The CSOF was used to develop an after-school recreation program for children in Onondaga, and to introduce a recreation-based, parent-involved program for at-risk preschool youth in Chatham.

Finally, yesterday's budget spoke of a new program in my ministry called Active 2010, which will promote increased participation in sports and physical activity particularly for children, youth and low-income individuals.

My ministry will continue to promote good health in Ontario's youth by strengthening community delivery systems and creating supportive environments for participation in physical activity, sports and recreation.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Premier. Fourteen years ago the Parliament of Canada promised to end child poverty by the year 2000. Before the last election you were advised that ending the child tax benefit clawback was the single best way to end child poverty in Ontario. You promised the Campaign Against Child Poverty that you would do just that. You promised that you would be giving back $233 a month to a family on social assistance. Yet your budget yesterday gave them $7.42, which is less than 3% of what you promised. That money is less than you are going to charge them in new taxes, levies and other clawbacks. Do you think that $7.42 is going to do anything to end child poverty?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): To the minister, Speaker.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Indeed, we will not claw back the July 1 increase from the federal government for one year, and we are reviewing that clawback for the year. These monies are used for children's programs across the province. We're evaluating those programs. We have heard some good things about them, and we have heard some not-so-good things about them. We don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater—throw them all out. We are evaluating them, and within a year we will have the answer to that question.

Mr Prue: In the letter of July 31, 2003, the Premier wrote: "Second, my team and I oppose the Conservative government's practice of clawing back the national child benefit (NCB), a practice we will end during our first mandate." Other governments have already ended the clawback—Manitoba quite recently—and you promised to follow. But you have broken that promise. Sadly, almost nothing is contained in the social services budget for the next two years. The reality is, I do not believe, nor does anyone studying this believe, you have any intention of ending the national child benefit clawback now or anytime during this mandate. Why have you broken your promise to the poorest children in our province?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'd like to say to the honourable member that we have not broken our promise. We need this year to disentangle which programs are necessary and which aren't. A lot of those are programs that parents have told me they want, if they have the choice. In other parts of the province they have said no; they want the money. We need this year to evaluate those programs. With respect to your comments on social assistance, my colleague Minister Pupatello has increased social assistance. To say that we've done nothing is wrong.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. I noticed within the fine print of budget papers that it states: "We propose to return the definition of northern Ontario, for the purposes of government policy and program delivery, to what it was before September 2000." Can you clarify for me and my constituents if Muskoka will be considered part of northern Ontario, yes or no?

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): The simple answer is no.

Mr Miller: Minister, I will tell you that yesterday was a very sad day for the people of Muskoka. It seems like your government might be confusing those who have cottages in Muskoka with those who live and work there.

I would like to share some statistics from the Stats Canada census in 2001. The average family income in the district of Muskoka was in fact over $10,000 less than the provincial average. I might add, for the information of the minister, that Muskoka's average family income is $5,500 less than the minister's riding of greater Sudbury. Are you telling me that Muskoka is not in need of the same services offered to the north? According to your logic, Sudbury would be excluded from these services as well. This is wrong and without any social or any economic justification. It is mean-spirited and will have drastic effects on the hard-working families of Muskoka.

Minister, will you stand in your place today and reverse this unfounded and harmful decision?

Hon Mr Bartolucci: No, we won't reverse the decision, and you're right: The people of Muskoka should be upset, because you and your government left this government with a $6.2-billion deficit, and we've had to make some tough choices. One of those choices was to redefine northern Ontario, to return to the definition of northern Ontario prior to the year 2000. Let me tell you that the district of Muskoka will receive and have access to the same services as the rest of central and southern Ontario.

1450

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have with us today in the members' gallery Mr Bruno Romeo, mayor of Mammola, Italy. Please join me in welcoming him.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I have a petition concerning the privatization of health care.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government has announced in their budget that they are delisting key health services such as routine eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reverse the delisting of eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services and restore funding for these important and necessary services."

I know the member for York North, Julia Munro, has submitted a similar petition. I affix my signature.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the previous government spent excessive amounts of taxpayers' money on partisan advertising for the supposed purpose of promoting their initiatives; and

"Whereas this advertising took the form of glossy direct mail flyers, television commercials and radio advertisements costing the taxpayer close to half a billion dollars;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support legislation that will make this type of advertising illegal in the province of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition, I affix my signature to it.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Liberal government has announced in their budget that they are delisting key health services such as routine eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reverse the delisting of eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services and restore funding for these important and necessary services."

It's signed by one of the most important members in my community.

PESTICIDES

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It's a pleasure to present this petition on behalf of many Ontarians, but particularly on behalf of Eireann Oughton, who was one of the authors organizing this petition. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Toronto has recently joined more than 66 other Canadian cities in banning the non-essential use of pesticides on residential property; and

"Whereas pesticides are widely believed to cause cancer in humans; and

"Whereas one in nine Canadian women is expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer during her lifetime; and

"Whereas Rachel Carson, who began public awareness of the effects of pesticides and died of breast cancer, is celebrated on Rachel Carson Day (May 27);

"Therefore we request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario honour the work of Ms Carson and the lives of all Ontarians affected by cancer by passing a law banning non-essential use of pesticides throughout the province.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That it honour the work of Ms Carson and the lives of all Ontarians affected by cancer by passing a law banning non-essential use of pesticides throughout the province."

I support this petition.

GO TRANSIT SERVICE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition from another group of commuters on the Milton line in Mississauga. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the city of Mississauga has, within a generation, grown from a linked collection of suburban and farming communities into Canada's sixth-largest city, and tens of thousands of people daily need to commute into and out of Mississauga in order to do business, educate themselves and their families and enjoy culture and recreation; and

"Whereas gridlock on all roads leading into and out of Mississauga makes peak period road commuting impractical, and commuter rail service on the Milton GO line is restricted to morning and afternoon service into and out of Toronto; and

"Whereas residents of western Mississauga need to commute to commute, driving along traffic-clogged roads to get to overflowing parking lots at the Meadowvale, Streetsville and Erindale GO train stations;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, instruct GO Transit to allocate sufficient resources from its 2004-05 capital budget to proceed immediately with the acquisition of land and construction of a new GO train station, called Lisgar, at Tenth Line and the rail tracks, to alleviate the parking congestion, and provide better access to GO train service on the Milton line for residents of western Mississauga."

As one of those residents, I'm pleased to affix my signature and ask Natasha to carry it for me.

RETAIL SALES TAX

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'd like to present a petition on behalf of Bob Burke, the director of the St Vincent de Paul community support headquarters in Bowmanville, in my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the sale of used furniture and household wares by charities is currently subject to provincial retail sales tax under the Retail Sales Tax Act; and

"Whereas the collection of RST on used goods sold by charities places an additional burden on the charities collecting the tax and increases the price of the product; and

"Whereas the collection of RST under these circumstances amounts to double taxation because owners of the donated goods have already paid the original retail sales tax; and

"Whereas the federal government does not require charities to pay goods and services tax (GST) on used items donated to charities for resale;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully request the Ontario Legislature to take immediate action to remove the RST from used furniture, housewares and all used goods donated for resale to charitable organizations."

I am pleased to sign this and endorse it on behalf of the most vulnerable people in Ontario, the people who in most cases avail themselves of these opportunities.

PRIMARY CARE

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "Whereas the community of Peterborough is suffering a crisis in terms of accessibility to health care, brought on by the severe and growing shortage of family physicians; and

"Whereas the community of Peterborough has demonstrated extraordinary, strong local leadership in

developing a proposal for primary care reform which is very innovative and will provide access to primary care for the growing list of more than 20,000 residents in our community without a family physician; and

"Whereas this proposal has been endorsed by the county of Peterborough, the city of Peterborough, the Peterborough County Medical Society, the Peterborough Community Care Access Centre, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre and the Peterborough County-City Health Unit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work with representatives of the local community to ensure that all residents of Peterborough have access to an appropriate primary care provider through the timely implementation of the proposed integrated primary care model, as this model provides appropriate and equitable compensation for family physicians while incorporating sufficient interdisciplinary health care providers, community linkages and appropriate administrative, infrastructure and information technology supports to enable health professionals to enjoy a more realistic, healthy work-life balance."

My own family doctor has signed it and I will affix my signature to it.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition signed by the good citizens of Cambridge.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario McGuinty Liberal government has plans to delist chiropractic, physiotherapy and optometrist services from OHIP coverage; and

"Whereas 1.2 million people use chiropractic services each year in Ontario and many more, including numerous seniors, use physiotherapy and optometrist services; and

"Whereas these services are an important part of our health care and, if privatized, will not be available to those who cannot afford them;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not delist chiropractic, physiotherapy and optometrist services from OHIP coverage."

Please stop the two-tier health system.

1500

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the previous government spent excessive amounts of taxpayers' money on partisan advertising for the supposed purpose of promoting their initiatives; and

"Whereas this advertising took the form of glossy direct mail flyers, television commercials and radio advertisements costing the taxpayer close to half a billion dollars;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support legislation that will make this type of advertising illegal in the province of Ontario."

I'm pleased, Speaker, to affix my signature, and I ask Kristina to deliver it to you forthwith.

RETAIL SALES TAX

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): The petitions keep coming in, and it's the same issue I've already read in with respect to my constituents in the riding of Durham, all who have signed this petition, thousands of them, I might say.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the sale of used furniture and housewares by charities is currently subject to provincial retail sales tax under the Retail Sales Tax Act; and

"Whereas the collection of RST on used goods sold by charities places an additional burden on the charities collecting the tax and increases the price of products; and

"Whereas the collection of RST under these circumstances amounts to double taxation because owners of the donated goods have already paid the original retail sales tax; and

"Whereas the federal government does not require charities to pay goods and services tax (GST) on used items donated to charities for resale;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, request the Ontario Legislature to take immediate action to remove the RST from used furniture, housewares, and all used goods donated for resale to charitable organizations."

And—Amina?

Interjection: Adrianna.

Mr O'Toole: Adrianna. Pardon me. My glasses don't work. Adrianna is going to present this petition to the table.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp (MPAC) and are subject to property taxes; and

"Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourist economy, without requiring significant municipal services; and

"Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003; and that the tax not

be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers and trailer parks, municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders."

I'll affix my name to this petition.

WATER QUALITY

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I have a different petition, but a very important petition, from the riding of Durham. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the riding of Durham is made up of many small communities such as Hampton, Tyrone, Blackstock, Newtonville, Kendal, Greenbank, Prince Albert, Epsom, and others; and

"Whereas not all citizens live in larger cities such as Toronto, where access to municipal water services is taken for granted; and

"Whereas smaller communities have little, if any, access to municipal water services; and

"Whereas Ontario's smaller villages and hamlets are home to many community buildings such as churches, community halls and arenas; and

"Whereas those responsible for halls,"—mostly volunteers—"churches, arenas and other community facilities take pride in ensuring these buildings have access to the highest quality potable water; and

"Whereas churches, community halls and arenas are at the heart of rural communities and it is important that they remain open to the public, with full services available;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take the following immediate action:

"That the implementation of regulation 170/03 as it relates to community halls and similar facilities be delayed; and

"That fair and open reviews of the regulation be conducted with respect to its impact on community facilities; and

"That the province of Ontario ensure halls, churches, arenas and other public facilities on private wells comply with water safety standards that are reasonable and appropriate."

I sign and endorse this on behalf of the riding of Durham.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2004 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 18, 2004, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): The leader of the official opposition.

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'd like to say it's a pleasure to rise today and speak about yesterday's budget, but I think I'm sharing the feelings of many Ontarians today. I don't know if "pleasure" is the right word.

There's a certain integrity, I guess, and ability, when you take the people's trust, to be able to deliver on what you promised. I understand that may not always be possible, but I think the intention should always be there.

I don't think there is doubt in anybody's mind that Mr McGuinty planned and said very definitely during the course of last fall's election campaign, "I will not raise taxes on Ontario families." He was quoted on CFRB as saying, "I won't raise taxes one cent on Ontario families." They claimed that they had a four-year, fully costed plan that was independently costed by two or three individuals. They claimed that even if the deficit was as high as $3 billion, they could eliminate it "like that," to quote them.

They introduced a budget yesterday called The Plan for Change, and really it's all about how they changed their plan. I thought there was a really telling comment in the lock-up scrum by the Minister of Finance yesterday when asked by a particular reporter about why they promised one thing and did another thing after the election. Mr Sorbara responded to the reporter by saying, "It's the realities of the work that we do. It reminds me," he said, "of a former Prime Minister"—he was referring to Pierre Elliott Trudeau—"who promised not to introduce price and wage controls before the election, and after the election he said," and I quote Mr Sorbara yesterday, "'Zap, you're frozen.'" Well, yesterday was "Zap, you're taxed."

You know, we've seen this movie before.

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): Why do you think this province is in such horrible shape?

Mr Eves: We will come to that in a minute, I say to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. We'll come to the magic $4-billion tax in a minute, the "Puff, the Magic Dragon" tax.

The reality is that this government keeps on saying there was a huge deficit that they inherited, that they couldn't do anything about it, and yet magically they've gone from $6.1 billion, they claim, last fiscal year, to $2.2 billion this fiscal year.

How did they do that, Mr Speaker? They have a tax that they call the hydro tax. They claim it will net them $3.9 billion in this fiscal year, although the reality is that the NUG contracts that they talk about run from now until 2046, and the reality is that it will raise $200 million a year, not $4 billion. For this year it won't even raise $200 million because it was introduced only partway through the fiscal year. They want to take all the money that they will raise over more than the next 20 years and put it on the books of the province for this year, and they claim that that gets the number down to $2.2 billion. Then, next year they claim they'll get another $1.5 billion more in revenue on top of the magic $4 billion that won't

be available to them next year because that will already be counted in this year's books. They don't make any claim as to where they anticipate they'll get that extra $5.5 billion.

The reality is, Mr Speaker, that they've sort of spun themselves out of control. They've spun this statement that there's a huge deficit that they inherited, and now they're hoisted on their own petard. The reality is that there was not a $6.2-billion deficit last year. The reality is that it was more in the neighbourhood of $2.2 billion, the reality is that that exact same $2.2 billion will still be there this year, and the reality is that the revenue of the province does not go up—I don't know how long many members have been around here, but I've been here for 23 years, and I have never seen the revenue of the province of Ontario go up by $10.2 billion in one fiscal year. It's impossible.

1510

The reality is they have grossly understated the revenue from last year, and we know a few of the ways they did that. They chose to write off all the coal powered plants in Ontario last year because they claim they're going to deliver on their commitment to close every single one of them down—there won't be one operating in the province by December 31, 2006. So they chose to take that into last year's books. That's about a billion dollars.

They chose not to take into account the fact that they got $778 million from the federal government in the last fiscal year. In fact, the federal government made a point of saying, "We want if off our books in the last fiscal year and it should go on to the province's books in that fiscal year as well." The Honourable John Manley, the former federal Liberal finance minister, whom this government hired to advise them on Ontario Hydro, told them the $778 million should go on last year's books. But they don't want last year's books to look good, so they took that billion dollars and moved it to this year's books, as opposed last year's books, despite the fact that the Honourable Mr Manley told them that was incorrect, improper and they shouldn't be doing it.

They did the same thing with the SARS money. They did the same thing with the Teranet money.

When you add all those numbers up, you get to the magic $4-billion figure. They had to somehow explain away their $4 billion difference, so they came up with the hydro tax. It's there on March 31, now you see it, and when you wake up on April 1, poof, like Puff the Magic Dragon, it's gone. The $4 billion has disappeared forever and we'll never have to find it again, not in the next fiscal year or the one after that or the one after that. It's a magic number that has just disappeared off the face of the earth.

The reality is that they have really politically spun themselves out of control. If they had just been up front with the people of Ontario and told them, "The deficit is $2.2 billion. We have a difference of opinion with the former government. They claim they could have sold assets to balance the books." They have said, I will give them credit for this much, that they're not interested in doing that, in balancing the books of the province that way, and that's a fair comment. But I think the very least we should do is have an open and frank discussion about what the deficit really was, and what it is as we go forward.

It can't possibly be that, because you can't possibly go up by $10.2 billion in one year. Where is that money coming from? I had three different sets of Ministry of Finance officials, with whom I'm well acquainted, having been the finance minister for over five years in this province, and I asked them in the lock-up yesterday to explain it, and not one of them could explain it. You know why? Because it's inexplicable, because it's hidden in the $4-billion magic treatment tax, the Puff the Magic Dragon tax, the $4 billion that never existed in last year's budget. That's why they can't explain where it came from or went to.

I look at personal income tax. They say that personal income tax in the last fiscal year was down almost a billion dollars—$882 million. I had finance officials in and I asked them how they got that number, because I happen to know, being a former finance minister, that the federal government collects your personal income tax. There is no way that this government knows or that any government knows at the provincial level, except for Quebec, which administers its own provincial income tax. They will not know what the number was for the year ending March 31, 2004, until September or October of 2005 at the very earliest, and will probably not really know until about this time in 2006. So they've made that number up.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Oh, come on.

Mr Eves: Yes, you have made it up. You've made the number up. And when I pressed finance officials yesterday as to where that number came from, he said, "Well, it's just a guess, because the latest number we have from the federal government is the 2002 number." Now, how are we to believe they know what the number was for March 31, 2004, when the latest number they have, by their own admission, from the federal government is March 2002, two years prior to that? But that didn't suit their political spin purpose, so they made one up that was much lower and put it in.

They have created their own $4-billion problem. To get themselves out of their $4-billion problem, which they created on paper, they have made it disappear on paper with the magic hydro tax, which won't gain them anywhere close to $1 billion dollars, let alone $4 billion in this fiscal year. It will probably be $150 million that will come into the province of Ontario this year as a result of that hydro tax, but they're claiming and booking $4 billion upfront.

When you look at other economic indicators for last year in the budgetary documents, on page 70, and you look at things like retail sales tax, it's up almost $100 million; the employer health tax is up almost $200 million; and land transfer tax is up $100 million. Those are indications of how consumers out there are doing, how much money they're making, how much money

they're spending. I can tell you, with those numbers going up every single year, there is no way the provincial income tax went down almost $1 billion dollars at the same time that all those other numbers were going up. The people wouldn't have had the money to spend $100 million more on retail sales tax, I can tell you from personal experience, they wouldn't have had $200 million more to spend on employer health tax, they wouldn't have had $100 million more to spend on land transfer tax to buy new houses, if they didn't have the income and the money to do it. It's only logical.

It's going to be very interesting when we come to a year from now as to where they're going to find the $4 billion if they want to continue this political spin in the succeeding budget, because they will have already booked it in this fiscal year, so they wouldn't be able to book it again next year. They've really got themselves a problem, and it's really a problem of politics and of their own making, in my humble opinion.

In addition to the taxpayer protection pledge promise that was obviously not lived up to, I think the just as scary thing to me, and I'm sure to Ontarians as well, is that you have a government whose leader said that families were already paying enough for health care with their taxes. I remember when Chris Stockwell, a leadership candidate in our party in 2002, floated the idea of having increased health care premiums or taxes in the province. This is what Dalton McGuinty said then, on January 25, 2002: "Families are already paying for health care with their taxes. Pay more for health care, pay twice for health care.... That's the Tory plan, but it is certainly not the Liberal plan."

He said they would never do that, they would never introduce a new tax for health care in the province of Ontario, that Ontarians were already paying for that, and it would be unfair of the government to implement a new tax on health care. He was quite correct, it would be unfair, yet that's exactly what was done in yesterday's budget, and all because of a matter of political spin that doesn't suit their political purpose.

Then he we went on to talk about protecting health care and education, talking about how they're the two most important expenditures that government can make, and I understand that and I agree with that. They are the two most important expenditures that a government can make on behalf of the people of Ontario. He said he would never raise taxes to pay for health care and education, "but if at some time in the future we think it's important to raise taxes, I have continuing faith in the collective wisdom of the people of this province, and I'll put it before them. We can have a referendum," McGuinty said.

When asked in the House today about that very commitment the Premier of today made to the people of Ontario, he now refuses to live up to that commitment. In fact, he has decided to raise taxes—his decision. I don't happen to think it's the right one, but his government has gone ahead with that, and now he won't live up to the commitment he made to the people of Ontario, that if, at some time in the future, any time he did that, he would hold a referendum in the province.

1520

So I think we have some pretty basic problems, fundamental problems, as to how the people of Ontario are going to be able to rely upon anything the government says as it goes forward. They had a four-year plan. That's apparently now been scrapped, the election four-year plan. So now they have a new four-year plan. So what is to make the people of Ontario think they're going to pay any more attention to this four-year plan than they paid to the last four-year plan they had?

The province of Ontario has done very well over the last number of years. Over the last five years, we reduced the debt in this province by some $5 billion, but over the next four years, we're looking at the debt of the province going up by about $12 billion.

The budget that was introduced yesterday will raise an additional $9.7 billion in taxes of one form or another, whether they're called user fees, taxes, cancellation of previous tax credits—and by the way, I do question some of those cancellations of tax credits like, for example, people who pay retail sales tax on motor vehicles that are adjusted to assist disabled people. That's a tax credit that we'd put in; we took the retail sales tax off those vehicles to help disabled people. You know, for the life of me, I don't understand why the government would put that back on. Also tax incentives to employers to improve their workplace, to help disabled people—they've taken those tax incentives away.

You can have a reasonable debate about some of these issues, but I say to my friend the Minister of Finance, I really can't understand those two in particular, as to why the government would remove those tax credits from some of the most—through no fault of their own—needy people in society. Surely we have an obligation as a society to take care of those people.

In the budget that we saw introduced yesterday, we are going to see some $1.6 billion in this fiscal year raised in a new health tax, and that will net the government over $2 billion a year in succeeding fiscal years. We saw a $1.1-billion increase in personal income tax yesterday; we saw the Puff the Magic Dragon $3.9-billion hydro tax, which will be collected over the next 20 years, but we're going to book it all in this fiscal year; and we see some $200 million in increased tobacco taxes, taxes on wine, spirits and beer.

In addition to all that, they all add up, if you count the tax credits that are taken away, the user fees that are increased, such as drivers' licences going up 50% and the tax increases. There are really about 50 tax increases in the budget that was introduced yesterday. This $9.7 billion is on top of the $4.3 billion that was introduced by the government on January 1 this year.

Let's just talk about health care and education for a moment. I would agree with the Premier that the two most important issues in the province are health care and education. We certainly believe that. They believe that. The reality is that over the last eight years that we were

the government in Ontario, health care spending actually increased about $11 billion a year. I've heard the Premier say—and I see the Minister of Finance agreeing—that it's not more money we necessarily need; we need to spend it more wisely, people have to be more accountable in the health care system etc.

We've also talked about the education system, and the government has made a commitment to increase education spending by some $2.1 billion, I believe, over the next four years. The same thing applies there. Over the course of our mandate, education spending went from $2.9 billion year to, I believe, $15.3 billion in Ms Ecker's last budget. I think we actually committed—

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Now you're adding apples and oranges.

Mr Eves: We actually committed more than that, I say to the Minister of Finance, because as he knows, the day after Rozanski tabled his report, we committed some $640 million immediately, basically for teachers' salaries in the province, as well as an additional $300 million. So that went up almost a billion dollars, literally within 24 to 48 hours, because we believed in the report from Dr Rozanski. We wouldn't have asked for the report if we didn't believe in it, and we responded to it.

So I don't think it's quite fair for the government of the day to say that we cut health care funding, that we cut education funding, when I'm sure the Minister of Finance knows full well that we dramatically raised health care funding and education funding in the province. You can have a debate as to whether it was enough or not, you can have a debate as to whether it was in the place they'd like to see it spent or not—that's all fair for debate—but the reality is that they were dramatically increased.

Every government in this country has a challenge with respect to increased health care costs. I really believe there has to be a much better, more permanent system of sharing health care costs between the federal government and the provincial governments in this country, because you have more ability at the federal level to pay in terms of surpluses. More and more responsibility is being put in the laps of the provincial governments when you see a federal government that over the years has actually reduced its share of funding to health care, let alone kept up with increased health care costs.

I say to the Minister of Finance opposite, a 4.3% increase in health care funding may sound like a lot of money to people out there, but as I'm sure he well has heard during course of his pre-budget consultations, the health care community will tell you that they consider the cost of living in their sector of the economy to be about 8% or 9% a year. It's a challenge. I understand it's a challenge.

But then we get to some of the more basic promises that the governing party made during the course of the election campaign, like hiring 8,000 more nurses and 1,000 more teachers. In the budget numbers we saw yesterday, actually, all this will enable the government to do is probably keep nurses' salaries in line with the cost of inflation, let alone hire one single new nurse in the province, and probably keep teachers in line with the cost of inflation—which is about $340 million a year, as I recall—let alone hire one new teacher in Ontario. So I think it's important to keep all these things in perspective.

Those very people—the front-line health care workers, the nurses in our society, the educators in our classrooms—are going to be hit with this new health tax. They're going to have to make about 1,200 bucks more next year just to break even, because they're going to have to pay about $600 a year more, and I'm sure the Minister of Finance is aware of that. I'm sure he's also aware that he has the OMA negotiations coming up, and many other things. He's going to have to find money for a lot of different parts of the education and health care sectors.

So it's a real challenge. I understand it's a challenge. I had that challenge for some five years, and I think we met it very well. But I don't think you're going to solve the problem by politically trying to spin a problem that didn't really exist in the first place to explain why you can't deliver 231 campaign promises that you had to have known at the time you made them you couldn't possibly afford to make to the people of Ontario. That's what all this comes down to at the end of the day. You can't make promises, or shouldn't make promises—obviously, you can—that you can't keep. I think that basically is the whole nub of the entire issue around the credibility of the government.

Far be it from me, who's stepping down as leader of my party, to give my friend opposite and the Premier and the government any advice, but I'd just say to you that there was this perception out there before yesterday that this was a government that could not be trusted to keep its word, that they were not doing after an election what they promised to do before an election. You can debate that all you want, but the reality is, I firmly believe that is the perception of the overwhelming majority of Ontarians out there. Unfortunately for the government, I say, in a political sense now, yesterday's budget did nothing but confirm that perception in Ontarians' minds. They have now had solidified in their minds, "We cannot trust this gang at Queen's Park who are currently the governing party to deliver on commitments they make, because they haven't done very well so far."

It's never too late to perhaps rethink your political spin, if that's what this is all about. But at the end of the day, I really have to believe that the government would be better served in the long run, and I know that the people of Ontario would be better served in the long run, by this government being up front with respect to the finances of the province—nobody said it was easy, nobody pretends it's easy—getting down to business and actually dealing with and resolving the issues at hand.

The $4-billion magic hydro tax, which will take over 20 years to collect but we're booking it all in this year, won't be there next year. Where's that $4 billion coming from next year? I see we're projecting that revenue next year will be $79.9 billion, up another $1.5 billion on top

of the $4 billion. So we're going to have a $5.5-billion problem next year, $5.4 billion if you want to be really technical and add them both together. That's a real challenge.

The reality is that I don't believe that challenge ever existed in the first place. I believe it was political spin that created that challenge. Now they've spun themselves into a wee bit of a problem over there.

1530

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and respond to the budget presented by the Minister of Finance in this place.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): Sit down.

Mr Baird: The member for Etobicoke-whatever can say that I should sit down, but I'm going to speak for my constituents, regardless of what he says, because there are a lot of working families who want to be heard, and they're going to be heard.

The people in Ontario most importantly care about integrity in government. They care about election campaigns. They like to participate in election campaigns. They like to watch them and follow them. They want to watch and listen to the promises candidates make. They want a party that will keep its word.

One of the proudest days I had was after the first budget was presented in 1996. Someone came up to me and said, "I want to tell you, I disagree with everything your government is doing, but at least you're doing what you said you would do. You campaigned on a difficult platform and you're keeping your word." When we were re-elected in 1999, it was in large measure because we had kept our word, because we had kept our promises, because people could trust us that when we said something, we would deliver, with respect to balanced budgets, tax increases and spending.

The people in Ontario were so frustrated, so cynical, that after ten years of 66 tax increases and big-spending government, they went so far as to say, "We want each candidate who's running for office to sign a pledge that you'll vote for a bill called the Taxpayer Protection Act, and another one called the Balanced Budget Act." It wasn't enough just to promise it. They wanted you to sign on the dotted line and specifically promise to introduce and support a bill that would do X, Y and Z.

We passed that law in this House in 1999. I can remember New Democrats being in here speaking against it, saying many of the lines the government is now saying, but every Liberal MPP who showed up for the vote stood in favour of that bill. They said they would live up to it. They said they would honour their pledge. They said they would keep the faith.

In the last election campaign, the taxpayers federation wasn't satisfied with the bill that was now the law of the land. They went to candidates again, and they said, "We want you to sign a pledge saying you'll support the bill you voted for so there's no ambiguity, no ifs, ands or buts, so it is crystal clear what you're agreeing to do."

With great fanfare, on September 11—another disaster of a day of September 11—Dalton McGuinty signed the taxpayers' protection pledge, promising, in what amounts to 50 short words, that he would keep the faith with the bill he voted for, that he would balance the budget, that he would not raise taxes, that he would keep spending under control. He also specifically promised that he would have a referendum, that he would let the people decide about any tax increase, should circumstances change.

We wonder why people are cynical about politics and politicians. We wonder why people think they can't trust politicians. It's because of actions like the one taken by Dalton McGuinty and Greg Sorbara, where they promised something they couldn't deliver. I saw a poll out the other day which said that 54% of people have come to the conclusion that Dalton McGuinty deliberately signed that pledge knowing that he couldn't keep it, which is outrageous.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Was that 56% or 54%?

Mr Baird: It's 54%. Unfortunately, I think they're right. I'll tell you, working families in Ontario are angry and they are frustrated. You should hear the calls reported from my constituency office in Bells Corners, the calls coming into talk radio, and to CFRA radio in particular. The host had the Minister of Finance on his show this morning.

Interjection: What did he say?

Mr Baird: He said, "Good morning, Minister. Hello. Minister, I respect you for the office you hold and the fact that you put your name forward for election, but, sir, I think you're a"—blank.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): What does it rhyme with?

Mr Baird: "Fire." That the host of a large, well-respected show, a well-respected citizen, Steve Madely, would say that to the Minister of Finance shows how low the political discourse has been brought by Dalton McGuinty and this gang, the Liberals. He said that was unparliamentary, actually, and Steve said that he wasn't a parliamentarian. This was related to me by one listener, my mother.

What have they raised in taxes? They're raising income taxes. There is no health care premium in this budget; it's an income tax increase. Anyone who says it's a health care premium is not being truthful. It is an income tax hike. It's a hike in your income tax. The sneakiest part of this initiative is that on your pay stub it's going to be lumped in with your income tax, so it won't even be up front on people's pay stubs how much they're paying. It won't even mention health at all. People who saw question period saw the member for Erie-Lincoln. He seriously questioned whether the money's even going to go to health. The bottom line is that people don't trust this government to do what they say they will do. They don't trust you.

I watched on television last night as every single major network in Ontario replayed those Liberal campaign ads where Dalton McGuinty looked right into the TV camera and said, "I won't raise your taxes." One

network—the CBC, of all things—ran a clip of Dalton McGuinty with a big smile signing the taxpayer protection pledge, with the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore standing over one shoulder and the Chair of Management Board, Gerry Phillips, standing at the other. What did Gerry Phillips used to do? He used to sit right here. He was the finance critic for the official opposition. Gerry Phillips, in committee in June, said that there was a $5-billion rift to the financial picture of the province of Ontario. There is no doubt that in dealing with one, two bouts of SARS, there's no doubt that in dealing with mad cow, there's no doubt that in dealing with the biggest electricity blackout in North America, it was a challenging fiscal year. There is no doubt.

People have said to me, "You know, you're always complaining against the government. Why don't you propose what you would have done?" I've said, "That's what Ernie Eves and I did last November." In an unprecedented way we presented a 17-page plan on how this government could balance the books. They didn't do anything, because they were more concerned with vilifying the former Conservative government than they were about rolling up their sleeves and getting to work to deal with the financial challenges that this province faces. That is outrageous.

We also looked at the financial picture after year-end. We said, "Well, didn't you, from the Tory budget, budget $770 million of revenue from the health care money that the Premier got from the Prime Minister?" "Well, Erik Peters said, 'You can't count on getting that.'" Well, guess what? We got it. Jean Chrétien kept his word and honoured that $770-million commitment, the one commitment that he made on his way out the door. He honoured his word on that one.

What about the $331 million for SARS that came in to this government? This government settled for 30 cents on the dollar. That's a billion dollars of new revenue that you could have put right against that financial risk, and the deficit is down from $5.6 billion to $4.6 billion, like that.

1540

This government raised taxes, the biggest tax increase in Ontario history. Effective January 1, the fix was in, and in three months alone they brought in almost $1 billion of new revenue. So what's that now? We're down from $5.6 billion to $3.6 billion.

What has this government done in its first seven months in office? Some of my colleagues say they did nothing, that they took a vacation. I say half of them did. The other half engaged in what cannot be called anything less than an orgy of new government spending, $3 billion of new spending—spending like drunken sailors. I was telling the member for Lanark-Carleton that this gang is spending like drunken sailors, and do you know what he said? Norm Sterling said to me: "John, drunken sailors spend their own money, not other people's money."

Let's get back to the issue. We've got $1 billion from health, $1 billion from new taxes, and now we have $3 billion of new spending. That's $5 billion. Then the Minister of Finance talked about the verified and certified financial plan. All these well-respected people were saying there's a $2-billion contingency fund in Dalton McGuinty's plan. It was certified and verified. You get to $2 billion—my goodness, we have over $1 billion surplus, and that doesn't count the increased corporate tax revenue that you brought in. But no, they don't want a balanced budget. This is the first government who claimed to run a clean campaign before the election, and run a negative campaign after the election. That's outrageous.

We get this new payroll tax, this new health care tax, that's going to be collected through income. It's an income tax; let's just face it. It's going to hit families badly. Members of the NDP were saying that this is the first ever income tax where the more you make, the less you pay. The president of Canada Steamship Lines, if he actually paid taxes in Canada, would have loved that tax. But, of course, the president of Canada Steamship Lines, along with the rest of Paul Martin's empire, don't pay taxes in Canada because they can't afford to; they pay them in other countries.

What else did they raise taxes on? Spirits, Ontario wines—what a terrible effect that's going to have on the farmers in the member for Erie-Lincoln's riding—beer and coolers. I say to the members for Brant-Haldimand and Oxford, they're raising taxes again on tobacco—eight months. I could probably live with a tobacco tax increase. But, of course, they're going to put the money into cancer care, into cancer research, into palliative care, into smoking cessation or helping tobacco farmers realign, something these two members have fought so hard for. There's no commitment on that at all—none. It's a tax grab, pure and simple. There's no commitment to put that money to cancer care, cancer treatment or to help agriculture and farmers readjust to the new reality, and that is disgraceful.

The really big one, from the calls that the constituency office and I are getting, is the 50% increase in the driver's licence fee. The effect that's going to have on northern Ontario residents, whom the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka represents—would the last one out of northern Ontario please turn out the lights after this government's through with northern Ontario—and a lot of young people is incredible.

We looked at their social assistance policies. The reality is that a social assistance recipient would have made more money with John Baird as the minister in real terms than they do with Sandra Pupatello as the minister. That's the reality: a significant cut. They're breaking their promise on that. They were going to get rid of the clawback of the national child benefit. They'll do that on anything on a go-forward basis, but what they've clawed back they're going to keep. I can understand why a family on Ontario Works may have disagreed with the Conservative policy, but at least we were honest before voters went to the polls.

They're getting rid of the tough anti-fraud measures. What's happening on social assistance? I said to folks:

"Let's look up the welfare rolls." How many people have fallen off welfare? There are a lot more people working. The Minister of Economic Development has been bragging about new jobs. How many people have left the welfare rolls? None, and as a matter of fact there are 11,000 more people on welfare since Dalton McGuinty became Premier, and they put the green light to welfare fraud and said it's acceptable and something that they would tolerate. I'll tell you, there was no acceptance and there was no tolerance for welfare fraud under our government. The money went for those who were truly needy, not to those who were greedy.

You look at this budget's commitment to hospitals. When I think of hospitals, as I know all members do in their communities—I know the member for Lanark-Carleton and I are concerned about the Queensway-Carleton Hospital, the Ottawa Hospital, the Kemptville hospital, the Winchester hospital, the Perth and Smiths Falls District Hospital and the Almonte hospital.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): The animal hospital.

Mr Baird: It's not "animal" hospital, I say to the member for Ottawa Centre. This is serious. According to the Ontario Hospital Association, this budget is only funding 50% of inflation. At the Queensway-Carleton Hospital they don't negotiate the contract with the Ontario Nurses' Association; that's done provincially. The reality is, unless this government backs down, hospitals across Ontario are going to have to do one of two things: There are going to be longer waiting lists or there is going to be reduction in services. There's going to be reduction of nurses and reduction of other health care providers. That's the legacy of this government despite $9 billion more in spending compared to last year's budget. We're tremendously concerned about that and we will be talking to our folks in the hospitals, as I know all of our members will be doing.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke of the $4-billion hole in the budget. I want to take a moment to explain to people how serious this is. Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Liberal and NDP governments of the day entered into contracts with the private sector to generate electricity, about 1,700 megawatts of hydro. They didn't do a very good job negotiating these agreements and were paying eight cents a kilowatt hour. When the old Ontario Hydro was broken up, the liability for these contracts went to the government, to the province of Ontario. This government is taking that debt, that liability of these contracts at eight-cent power, and is sending it over to the Ontario Energy Board, and it's going to stick it on consumers: on residential customers, on farm operators, on industrial and commercial operators.

Last year they lost about $240 million because they signed bad deals. I wasn't in the cabinet that signed them, but I look to members opposite. Maybe they could provide some explanation.

They put these contracts over to the Ontario Energy Board and they're going save about $240 million. OK, you save $240 million by downloading it on to working families, so you're going to get a $240-million win. Then the Leader of the Opposition says, "No, look at the budget act." They're going to put all $3.9 billion as revenue even though not a single dollar changed hands. That's Enron-style accounting. That's what they did at Enron, and they went to jail at Enron.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: The member for Leeds-Grenville said, "Royal Group Technologies." That type of accounting may work at Royal Group Technologies, but we're not going let this government get away with that sort of accounting scam with taxpaying Ontarians. It's outrageous. It's a $4-billion hole. You could put a whole Mack truck factory through it: $4 billion, and not a single dollar changed hands. The audit committee and the board of Royal Group Technologies may have turned a blind eye to things, but we're not going to do that here in this House. We're going to hold the government of the day accountable for what is nothing short of an accounting scam.

I say to those members of the press gallery who may be watching, they're counting on your not being able to understand this, they're counting on your not being able to follow this argument, and I say to you, don't let them get away with it. After Enron and Worldcom and all the scams south of the border, we shouldn't allow them to get away with this.

1550

Mr Runciman: It's a shell game.

Mr Baird: "It's a shell game," the member for Leeds-Grenville says.

As I said earlier, Dalton McGuinty promised to have a referendum. Yesterday, the Minister of Finance said, "Well, you know what? We're going to break that promise. It costs too much money. That $40 million or $50 million for a referendum would be better spent on health care." Well, you know what? I've got an idea. We could hold a referendum for free. It wouldn't cost anything. We could just ask Jean-Pierre Kingsley, the head of Elections Canada, "Could we piggyback with your federal election on June 28?" I'm prepared to personally lead the fundraising campaign to buy the paper for the ballots.

Interjections.

Mr Baird: The member for Erie-Lincoln says we can use the photocopier in his office to help print them—and the member for Oxford—so that we can do this thing at no cost to Mr Sorbara's bottom line.

But all of a sudden, they didn't want to do it; they don't like the idea. When the Toronto Star—that blue-bannered newspaper, I say to my friends up on the third floor—approached Mr Sorbara outside this place, he said that he had already answered the question and he ran away. Mr Ferguson came up to me and said, "Did he answer that question?" I said, "You've been here for six months. Have you not noticed they never answer any question? Not a single question.

It's gotten so bad that I had to introduce a private member's bill on behalf of the people of Nepean-Carle-

ton to bring in a $500 fine, to fine these people when they don't answer questions. Somehow they think you get the corner office, the car and driver, all the bells and whistles, but you don't have to answer questions. They're not accountable to anyone at question period. We certainly can't call this "answer period" with this gang.

I am hearing from people in my constituency office—a woman from Manotick, who operates a chiropractic clinic, whom I met with on Saturday, and she wants to know why Dalton McGuinty is cutting chiropractic funding. She operates a small clinic in Manotick. She said, "They promised no spending cuts to health care." I said, "We'll have to wait for the budget." And it turns out her fears were justified.

I was in the office of an optometrist in Bells Corners the other day, and they've got a petition on the counter because they heard this government might be doing that. Of course, these people said we were fearmongering in recent weeks when this was suggested, and now they're doing that too. It's the same with physiotherapy, which is a concern to two constituents who called this morning from Stittsville and Osgoode.

Let's be very clear about what they're doing, what Dalton McGuinty is doing, I say to the people over at the Hepburn Block who are watching this in the minister's office, to Jason, to Rick and everyone: You're bringing in two-tier health care. You're bringing in user fees and two-tier health care, and the people of Ontario are angry and they want revenge. They want this government to hold the referendum and to be held accountable.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Nobody's watching.

Mr Baird: The member for Perth-Middlesex says nobody's watching. Well, I'll tell you, my constituents sent me here to fight for them, and you're going to be watching their anger when you go home during constituency week.

I say to those people watching, next week is constituency week. This place will close down business. If you live in the constituency of a Liberal MPP, get on the phone and say you want a meeting with them. Say you want to talk to them. If they won't give it to you, show up at their office on Tuesday morning at 9 o'clock and tell them to keep their promises. Tell them to keep their word. Tell them to keep their trust with the people of Ontario. You'll have the opportunity to do that next week.

What other tax increases did they bring in? The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the workplace accessibility tax incentive to help small businesses and medium-sized employers make accommodations for a disabled person. They got rid of that. Why? There's no justification.

The workplace child care tax incentive: They got rid of that. The graduate transitions tax credit: They got rid of that. The educational technology tax incentive: They're getting rid of that too, with no explanation. The Ontario home ownership savings plan to help working families who are struggling to save to buy their own home—the dream of home ownership. That's a double whammy for young working families: First they got hit in December with the news that they would not allow mortgage interest deductibility, and now they're being hit with the end of the Ontario home ownership savings plan.

I say to the limousine Liberals over there that when I first bought a home, the forerunner of this plan was a big help to me in terms of closing costs. A thousand dollars or $2,000 may be nothing to this group of limousine Liberals, but it's a lot to working families in Ontario. Another concern I have is the Ontario research employee—

Mr Eves: Richard Patten wishes he was a limousine Liberal.

Mr Baird: I like Richard Patten.

The Ontario research employee stock option credit: Mr Patten, the member for Ottawa Centre, will want to know about this one. This was an initiative brought in after the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Minister of Finance, doubled the number of spots at Ontario universities for high-tech and engineering and computer science. Carleton University particularly benefited from that program. The member for Lanark-Carleton pushed for that, because he's got a lot of constituents in Kanata who are employed in that area, as did I in south Nepean.

Interjections.

Mr Baird: Well, after they graduated, they started to leave the province because of high taxation levels. So we brought in the Ontario research employee stock option credit so that these young, talented men and women would stay in Canada, and if an engineer emigrated from Pakistan or India and decided to work in an Ontario-based company, they would have a reason to stay here and not go south of the border because of the more attractive tax rates.

It's gone, a terrible loss for research and development. And that's not just going to hurt us in the greater Ottawa area. It's going to hurt us in Markham; it's going to hurt us in the technology triangle—Cambridge-Kitchener-Waterloo.

Let's look at another one for research and development, the employer health tax exemption for stock option benefits paid to employees of research-intensive companies: the same objective for that one, but they're getting rid of it. I'll tell you, if we lose one bright research mind from this province as a result of it, it won't be worth the cost, because in Ottawa—in Nepean-Carleton, where I'm from, and in Lanark-Carleton—we don't attract a lot of big businesses, but we sure are great at creating new businesses that grow. Small businesses start off with two to five employees, and the next thing you know, they have a million dollars in revenue, and the next thing you know, over $100 million in revenue. This is going to do huge damage to those new companies, with no explanation as to why they're getting rid of these tax credits, and that's a tremendous concern.

I want to end by pointing to the real villain in this budget. His name is not on the cover. He's not an MPP.

He's not even an Ontario taxpayer. The reason for Ontario's fiscal challenges; the reason for our health care woes, rests with one person. Do you want to know his name?

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Give his initials first.

Mr Baird: PM. PM the PM. Paul Martin, the Prime Minister, is the architect of health care cuts in the province of Ontario. When Brian Mulroney left office, they were paying 18 cents on the dollar for health care. The province had to pay 82 cents, and the federal government paid 18 cents. By the time Paul Martin was fired as finance minister by the previous Prime Minister, health care spending had gone as low as 11 cents on the dollar, and we wonder why we have a challenge in the fiscal problems of Ontario and why we have a problem with health care in Ontario.

Interjections.

1600

Mr Baird: The member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot talks about tax points. I want to give Jean Chrétien a lot of credit for giving the tax points. He gave us lots of tax points for health care, and I give him full credit. He did that in 1978 when he was the finance minister, and Marc Lalonde and Alan MacEachen took it all back in the 1980s. They took back every single tax point they gave for health care. They cut federal taxes, the province moved in, and when no one was looking they raised taxes back to where they were. You can check the budgets of Alan MacEachen and Marc Lalonde in the early 1980s. In those budgets they took back the tax points Jean Chrétien gave as finance minister in 1978, and that's the truth.

The real villain, so when people watching at home are asking: Dalton McGuinty is committing highway robbery and it's Paul Martin who's driving the getaway car. If raising taxes for health care was a crime, Paul Martin could be an indicted co-conspirator. People in Ontario will render a verdict for his cuts.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Wait until June 28.

Mr Baird: The member for Dundas says, "Wait until June 28." I'm going to particularly watch his riding on the evening of June 28, I'm going to particularly watch his riding on that night, because we've got a great Conservative candidate there.

People in Nepean-Carleton want a referendum on this tax increase. Working families in Ontario want a referendum on this tax increase. If they don't get a referendum on this tax increase, there's going to be a referendum on June 28 in Ontario, and those 101 Liberal Dalmatians who voted to cut health care for 10 or 11 years in Ontario will have the wrath of voters because of these tax increases. Paul Martin had a choice. He could fund $2 billion to the boondoggle that is the gun registry; somehow they can register cows for a dollar a cow, but they wasted $2 billion on the gun registry. They had the billion dollars for the HRDC boondoggle. They had money for that and not for health care. The people of Ontario are going to hold them accountable. They had money to send $100 million to Groupaction in Quebec and Liberal-friendly polling firms. Criminal charges are pending. Kingston was the birthplace of the federal Conservative Party in—

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: the member for Nepean-Carleton has drifted so far off topic that he's on the wrong level of government.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I caution the member to keep to the point.

Mr Baird: I can understand they wouldn't want me talk about the $100 million that was stolen from our hospitals and went to Liberal advertising firms in Montreal, stolen right out of the operating rooms of the province of Ontario. There is an important opportunity for voters in Ontario at the next federal election to hold this government accountable. There are a lot of jobs that were lost because of this Liberal government. I'll summarize.

The member for Lanark-Carleton is here. Like me, he was preparing his income tax lately. What did it say on the tax form when you had to mail your cheque in? Did you send it to Ontario, to Sault Ste Marie? No. You used to have to send it to Sault Ste Marie. In eastern Ontario now, they fired a whole bunch of people in Ottawa, in Nepean-Carleton, to send our taxes to Shawinigan. With the help of people like David Pratt, they did it. Voters will have the opportunity to pass judgment on this government.

People in Nepean-Carleton, people throughout Ontario, want a referendum. We are going to fight for that referendum. We are going to want the people of Ontario to demand that Dalton McGuinty keep his promise, that he respect his word, that he honour the trust that people in Ontario gave to him on October 2. We're not going to give up without a fight. You can expect the biggest fight in this Legislature over taxes in a generation.

We are here as the voice of working families in Ontario. We will not let you declare war on the middle class. We will fight, and we will fight you tooth and nail to ensure that working families don't have to share this burden of your government.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 10 am tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1605.

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 20 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 20 mai 2004

The House met at 1000.
Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ELECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI ÉLECTORALE

Mr Patten moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 76, An Act to amend the Election Act / Projet de loi 76, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr Patten, you have 10 minutes to lead off.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I'm extremely pleased and honoured this morning to be able to bring forward my private member's Bill 76, An Act to amend the Election Act. It is a very straightforward, simple piece of legislation.

The bill in front of us today amends the Election Act, and it does two things: First, it requires that a candidate's nomination paper be accompanied by the endorsement of the registered party; and second, it provides for the inclusion of party affiliation on the ballot.

Many Ontarians have advocated for these changes over the years, including past and present members of the Ontario Legislature. In fact, the proposed changes mirror closely the intent of a bill introduced June 11, 2003, by Sean Conway, the former member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. Mr Conway's bill was not debated because of an election call, but it was widely supported by the members of the last Parliament, and I'm hopeful that there will be support for this bill from all sides of the House today. Mr Conway has said that he believes this bill will become an important part of the democratic reforms of our government and will champion these initiatives and help increase voting participation. I'm grateful for his support.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Mr Rossano Bernardi, a recent graduate of Algonquin College and Carleton University. He travelled by bus from Ottawa all evening and has joined us in the gallery today. This young gentleman sent me a letter in which he proposed changes to the act to allow placing party affiliation on the ballot, so I'm grateful to him. He spent a considerable amount of time and effort researching and writing his proposal because he firmly believes this change would benefit our democratic system in Ontario. It's important for us, therefore, to move forward on behalf of Rossano and his generation.

This bill puts into action recommendations from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, which approved placing political affiliation on the ballot as far back as 1989, almost 15 years ago. The committee's report on election laws and process was tabled as a draft bill and was also not debated because of an election call. The Chief Election Officer of Ontario has tabled numerous reports in the Legislative Assembly that have recommended the need to include the candidate's political affiliation on the ballot. These reports from the Chief Election Officer have consistently said that placing political affiliation on the ballot aids electors in making an informed decision at the polls.

It was recommended that section 27 of the Election Act be amended so that a candidate's political affiliation is designated on the ballot, and to review the wording of section 34 with regard to the form of the ballot. Today we have an opportunity to follow these recommendations in order to stop restricting the elector's access to basic information about a candidate's political affiliation.

It should also be said that the electoral law of Canada and, in effect, every province, with the exception of Newfoundland and Ontario, provides for the political affiliation of candidates to be listed on the ballot. Federally, amendments to the Canada Election Act in 1970 allowed the placing of political affiliations on the ballot for all subsequent elections. The office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada has indicated to us that these amendments have worked well. In other provinces, such as BC and Alberta, where we've contacted their offices recently, the chief electoral officers indicated that placing party affiliation on the ballot has improved clarity and choice for voters. So, in effect, Bill 76 will ensure that Ontario is in step with electoral practice in Canada and our changing demographics and living patterns.

The bill is addressing many issues regarding elections in Ontario. Bill 76 addresses the issue of confusion in situations where candidates have a similar name or the exact same name; placing party affiliation on the ballot solves this problem. It acknowledges today's reality of voter mobility. The rise of the mobile society has resulted in people moving often and not necessarily residing in the same riding for too long. Mobility, however, does not change one's beliefs or one's values. Providing political affiliation on ballots will allow them to identify with a

candidate and associate themselves with the party that they feel may best represent their views. Finally, this bill will help recent immigrants, especially those who speak different languages, to make a more informed choice at the ballot box.

I want to continue by recognizing the importance of democratic renewal in our province. As you know, our nation, a confederation, was born in 1867, based on the democratic system of responsible government, which was adopted by all of our provinces. However, there have been few changes to our democratic system since then. Parliamentary rules and the electoral system that elects the members still very much resemble those of the 19th century in Britain. Our government believes the time has come to bring these 19th-century traditions in line with the 21st century in Ontario.

1010

Today marks an important day in Ontario, one on which this democratic institution has an opportunity to improve the electoral system by ensuring that it is more clear to the people in our province. This government will propose bold initiatives to strengthen our democracy so we can improve the way it serves its citizens. Bill 76 is one small step in this process.

Let me say at this point that the minister responsible for democratic renewal, the Honourable Michael Bryant, will direct the newly created Democratic Renewal Secretariat to bring some real change in proposals to this Parliament. His parliamentary assistant, Caroline Di Cocco, will work closely with the secretariat to achieve this goal, and she will elaborate on that this morning when she speaks to this bill.

I stand today guided by the resolve of my party's commitment to improve democracy in Ontario and grateful for the unwavering leadership our Premier has shown in supporting real democratic reform. The Premier has talked about the need for better accountability, for better dialogue with Ontarians and a more transparent delivery of government services. This is democracy in action.

I will continue my remarks on a more personal basis. I know that the health of our democracy is an issue that is near and dear to the heart of each and every member in this House. I recall writing, four years ago, about my concern for the state of democracy in this place, and I'd like to quote a passage of what I wrote at the time:

"It is perhaps a measure of the well-being of our democracy that we rarely, if ever, think of it as being in any peril. By and large, we think of the health of our democratic institutions as stable and solid, if nothing else. On the rare occasions that our thoughts do such take a dark turn, we tend to imagine the loss of our democracy through a singular but cataclysmic event that would shake us to our foundations, something that would overturn our world, like an invasion or an occupation by a hostile, undemocratic enemy or a radical military coup from within. But what if our democracy started to slowly slip away in front of us and we did not even take notice?"

The reality is that the government of Ontario is less accessible and far less accountable than it was 10 years ago or than it has been since. I'm delighted to be part of helping to propose changes. Honestly, I've been thoroughly disheartened by the reality of the state of our democracy in Ontario.

Early in my career, working with the international branch of the YMCA, I travelled and lived extensively in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, South America and the West Indies. Those travels illustrated to me the meaning of having a thriving democracy, as well as the value of keeping it healthy and vital.

Today, while on the government side, the sanctity of the democratic process is further confirmed to me. Keeping democracy healthy is something that never happens naturally or on its own. It must be nurtured and occasionally even fought for. Sometimes democracy can be seen to be slow, burdensome, a difficult exercise. Without doubt, it has its frustrations. Be that as it may, if there is a clear, indisputable responsibility for those holding office, it is to fight for a healthier democracy.

In closing, I know there are some strong defenders of the status quo. I would of course defend their right to their position and their opinions, because we need to have a full debate about democracy and its renewal. However, I hope they will eventually realize that Ontario politics, government and democracy are not working as well as they could or should be, and need change. So I say to them that we truly have an opportunity to do something for the people we serve and that these amendments will be made in the name of a better democracy. That is why I am asking all members to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise to address Bill 76 in the name of the member for Ottawa Centre. I congratulate the member for bringing this bill forward, because I think it will spur some interesting debate in the Legislature this morning.

I think we all support similar themes: strengthening our democracy and strengthening the participation of citizens at the ballot box and in the electoral process. I take a different view of the means and methods of getting there, one quite contrary to the member for Ottawa Centre and the contents of Bill 76. I'll point to a couple of sections that I take particular umbrage with.

I believe that what weakens our system of democracy in Ontario and Canada is the growing strength of the leader's office and the party apparatus at the expense of the individual member. I hope that as the Attorney General moves forward on his democratic renewal process, he will choose to strengthen the role of individual MPPs and their ability to represent the constituents of their ridings and to express a greater latitude in their views than what comes out of the Premier's office or out of cabinet, and that then, in turn, the Attorney General would try to take steps away from the growing strength of the party apparatus in the leader's office.

I fear that Bill 76 takes us in the opposite direction, for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, the amended section 27 of the Election Act, further amended by section 9.2 of Bill 76, would have the party's leader

endorse a particular candidate. I think this is tremendously dangerous. We see it happening right now at the federal level, with Paul Martin appointing a series of candidates or threatening to appoint candidates in various ridings. I don't think that plays well with the themes of democracy, and it has caused many problems.

There's an article from British Columbia: "Grumbling grows for Martin's Recent Practice of Appointing Candidates in British Columbia." A Toronto Star editorial of April 26 says, "The riding executive makes a legitimate point in describing the appointment as undemocratic. Citizens in any riding should have the right to choose their candidate. If Cunningham"—one of the leading Paul Martin acolytes in British Columbia who's been appointed to run by the Prime Minister—"is the best person for the job, why is he shying away from competing against Kuo and Lee on his own merits?" The Star goes on to say, "This process subverts grassroots democracy. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all parties to fix the flaws in the nomination process."

So I strongly reject the notion of having the party leader sign off on individual candidates in the riding, which Bill 76, if I read it correctly, purports to do.

There's a recent lesson too in Hamilton East. I expect there has been debate within the Liberal caucus office, after a couple of drinks in the evening, when members can sometimes be a bit more honest with themselves. I was in that room myself not too long ago.

Interjection.

Mr Hudak: Sure. Sometimes we have those discussions late at night, and you say, "Did we make the right decision?" In Hamilton East, McGuinty and the geniuses in the Premier's office appointed Mr Agostino despite the fact that there were other Liberals who were interested in running. You can't argue that he anointed the candidate, and that was an issue in Hamilton East. I heard when I was knocking on doors, and you certainly saw in newspaper coverage, that there was some upset in Hamilton, on top of the Sheila Copps-Valeri debacle, that they didn't like the way the candidate was appointed by the leader's office. I think it is tremendously dangerous, and a local candidate should be on the ballot by his or her own merits in winning the party's nomination.

Of course there's the sad saga of Rob Foster in the town of Lincoln, a candidate who wanted to run for the provincial Liberals in 2003 in the riding of Erie-Lincoln as my opponent and was basically told, if I recall the story correctly, either by the leader or the Liberal Party of Ontario, that they had another favoured candidate and threatened to veto.

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): How do you know all this?

Mr Hudak: I am quite confident that my sources are correct. Rob Foster chose not to run, in favour of Vance Badawey, the eventual candidate. My view is that the local Liberals should have chosen their candidate. That's why I have great concern about that particular section.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: How were you chosen? Tell us how you were chosen.

Mr Hudak: I ran a competitive race and was fortunate enough to win the nomination in 1995, and—

Interjection.

Mr Hudak: You're getting me off my script here. John Fairlie, an accountant in Wainfleet, was the individual in that nomination.

Do you know what? I think there's a lot more we can do to strengthen the role of MPPs. The American and British systems, warts and all, I think members would agree, have a greater latitude for individual members to stray from the party line coming from the leader's office. Under the British system, with a larger number of members of Parliament and fewer cabinet positions on a per capita basis, members have a greater individualist streak in Great Britain. I think that's healthy, and I hope that if we do make changes to our electoral process here in Ontario, we'll do more to strengthen the individualism of MPPs of all three parties.

1020

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Hear, hear.

Mr Hudak: There we go.

The notion, therefore, of having the leader of the party sign off on the ballot and then putting the party on the ballot as well, I think, takes us away from grassroots democracy. The more we can do to strengthen the name and the role of an individual MPP so that when citizens are casting their ballots, whether it is in Beamsville or in Kingston and the Islands, they'll be voting for Mr Gerretsen or his opponents as opposed to voting for a Liberal Party or a leader—the more we can do to strengthen the local candidate's name and choice on the ballot, the better it is for democracy in Ontario and in our country, Canada. That's why, while I commend the member for Ottawa Centre for bringing this forward, I strongly reject this notion of strengthening the party and the leader's office at the expense of individual MPPs and individual choice for a candidate at the local level.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I am pleased to stand today to speak on Bill 76 that the member from Ottawa Centre, Richard Patten, has brought forward. I have to say that that member has been, for the time I've known him in opposition, an incredible voice for the ideals of our parliamentary system and for democracy in Ontario. One of the first discussions I had with Richard Patten had to do with democratic protection and enhancement of our system, and the ideas he brought forward in a paper I know, as parliamentary assistant, certainly are in the mix of the progress we're going to be making to enhance this Parliament and this Legislature.

It is important that the voters have an opportunity to know the different aspects of the candidates when they go in to vote. I think that is what the intent here is, that the voting public has the best information about the candidate when they go in to vote.

Our Election Act is 30 years old and needs a great deal of revamping. I believe that in the last election there was a list of candidates and the parties, but it was put outside the voting booth; it wasn't on the ballot. So there is a need that we put on the ballot not only the name of the

person but also what flag they are flying under when it comes to the party. The philosophy of the party will also impact and give an indication to the voter of the views or the general philosophy they have.

I've heard many people say that parliamentary democracy is tremendously flawed, but then the other part is "until we take a look at everything else that's out there." Parliamentary democracy is an important part of what I call good government. That's what helps to develop good government.

Our government has, in this mandate, put together a secretariat. That secretariat is going to be an ongoing enhancer of our democratic system. Yes, we do need to have a promoting of a stronger system here in Ontario. Again, it's ongoing. It is about more accountability. It is about the role we have as private members in this House, which is three-pronged: It is about our role of representing our constituents, which is important to each member in this Legislature; it is about the legislative role we have to better promote the issues that are dear and near to our hearts, such as the member from Ottawa Centre has done today; and then there is the scrutiny role on behalf of the people of Ontario, a scrutiny role that each one of us brings to bear on the executive in government. That is how come our parliamentary democracy is held as one of the best democracies in the world.

In enhancing the role of the private member, it's important that we develop a standard in this House. I say this because I was probably at the depths of my despair when I saw the budget being taken outside of this place. I felt it was undermining the whole understanding of what democracy is about, about the people's representatives being able to scrutinize how the people's money is being spent. To me, that was another erosion of democracy, which we must protect at all cost.

One of the important parts of our role in this House is on committees. There's a lot of work that needs to be done to change the culture of sometimes very parochial debate that I see, to be able to raise the standard of debate in this House so that we can actually discuss, with intelligence and substance, those things that are important to the constituents we are here to serve. Too many times, we have had a culture that has probably undermined that process.

I would like to say that this bill is a step toward enhancing democracy, but we also need to do so much more. Speaker, how does one change a culture of how things are done? You know, in your chair, that there are many times when there is disrespect for the work that's done here. The way we conduct ourselves in this House provides a view to the citizens about the type of work we do. It also enhances or deteriorates the credibility of who we are as the people's representatives here.

In the time I have, I would like to talk about the bigger picture of what democratic renewal is about. It's about trying to restore a sense of trust, integrity and ethics in how we conduct ourselves. Those are the altruistic reasons why we have to change the culture here. I would suggest we sometimes get involved in some inappropriate behaviour. I'm sure that when the students come in here they say to themselves, "Is this how our representatives behave?"

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am really pleased to speak in favour of this bill. I do believe it will do a great deal to provide good information to our voters.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join the debate today with respect to the member Mr Patten's bill to amend the Election Act. Having run and been elected three times, I certainly know a little bit about how the ballot can be configured, if you wish, in terms of people coming in.

I remember running in 1999. An individual by the name of Tracogna came in at about the last minute, obviously supported by a union—he was a union business agent. I don't even believe he resided in the riding, but he came in, came up with some kind of address they accepted and ended up on the ballot. My name is Tascona and the other person's name was Tracogna. I can tell you we weren't too happy about that, but there wasn't anything we could do about it. So I guess dealing with making the ballot fair is an issue, but there are people who can come in. If you wanted Jim Gerretsen to run against John Gerretsen down in Kingston and the Islands, I guess that could happen. What's the solution?

I can tell you that this bill deals with much more than putting the party banner beside your name. This bill is an erosion of my rights as an MPP. It increases the power of the leader. It smacks of the federal system. Quite frankly, I'm outraged because of what I've seen coming out of the federal Liberal party, with respect to their appointment of people parachuted into ridings because the leader wants them.

1030

What we have here, under section 9, basically makes sure that's the system we're going to be inheriting. I'll read it for the listening public to see what kind of democracy this is. This erodes the members' power and increases the power of the leader. It says:

"(9.1) Where the candidate, with his or her consent, has received the endorsement of a registered party, the nomination paper shall be accompanied by a statement certifying that the candidate has been endorsed by the party."

Fair enough. Fair enough that they know you're a member of a particular party.

It goes on to say:

"(9.2) The statement referred to in subsection (9.1) must be signed by the party leader as registered under clause 10(3)(c) of the Election Finances Act or by his or her agent."

What that is leading to basically is that if you want to run for any party, you'd better have that signature of your leader. Right now, we don't have that, and I don't support what is going on here.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: You don't have that?

Mr Tascona: The member from Kingston and the Islands is mouthing off on the other side as I'm trying to speak.

I think this is a fundamental issue of democracy in terms of the party process. It has nothing to do with this place; this has to do with nomination and fairness with respect to the person who wants to run, regardless of what the party apparatus thinks of that individual. What happened to fairness in the nomination?

When I was studying politics at McMaster University for four years, we talked about the party elite—this was back in the early 1970s—how they take over the nomination process and how it's an elitist system. An elitist system is basically created where the party apparatus says to people, "You're not going to be running. We don't care whether you're a good Liberal or not; you're not going to be running here because we want Joe Blow to run. He has been doing things for us, and we think he's a better candidate than you. We've done polling and we think that person should be there. We don't care what you've done in the riding. We don't even care whether you live in the riding or whether you've done anything for this riding. We're here in Toronto, at Queen's Park, and because we're the power, we think Joe Blow should be running."

A classic situation—and I have nothing against the man—is Ken Dryden. He just got appointed to run in York Centre—a good candidate. I know Art Eggleton was running. He had the nomination and he decided to step aside. They just shoved someone in and appointed him. I don't know whether he even lives in the riding. I think fundamental politics and democracy are that if you live in the riding, if you support that party, you should be allowed to run for that nomination—no questions asked. What I see here—and it should be under the title "restriction," where it says "signed by the party leader."

I say to Mr Patten: Where are you getting this from? Why is this coming out? I don't see anything democratic about this. I think it's kowtowing to the leader. I'll say this to my leader: If they think I need his signature to run, I'll run as an independent. I don't care. There are other people around here who would probably run as independents too, if they say, "Oh, I have to have your signature to run." After having gotten the support of the nomination from the people within the riding in a fair, democratic process, they're saying, "We don't want you to run. I'm not going to sign your papers if you run and win."

That's what happens out there. That's why you get people appointed. That's why people turn off the system at the local level. I can tell you, there are a lot of greenhorns around here on the Liberal side. You just wait until they turn on you and say, "You should have voted on that bill, buddy. You should have been there for us on that. You lose your PA." They don't want you to run next time. You can laugh all you want, but that's reality. That is the reality of how the party apparatus runs.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Is that what happened?

Mr Tascona: Like the member for Kingston and the Islands—he's just happy. I was with him when we used to go up north and do hearings, and we were doing a lot more hearings than the members are doing now. But I can tell you I have real difficulties with that part of the bill.

The other part of it, in terms of putting down party affiliation—I've run three times. I haven't run with any party affiliation. I've run on my own name and whatever. People knew who I was running for. But the bottom line is, you can have some issues. There's no doubt, if someone puts another candidate there—with the same name, certainly—you may want to look and say, "Maybe the party affiliation can be in there." But you could get games within the party affiliation. You could have the Liberal Party put down as a candidate for that, and then you could have something that would maybe be mirroring close to that—easier with respect to the Progressive Conservative Party, because you could have someone put down as the Conservative Party, depending on what the name games become. That's what the nonsense becomes.

This doesn't enhance democracy. I don't know why Mr Patten is putting this forth. Quite frankly, the way I look at it, if you're running and your name is on that ballot, that should be good enough. I've run municipally and I've run provincially. For him to say, "OK, we want to make sure you've got the party affiliation right beside there," to me smacks of—dealing with the Liberals these days, something's up here. Something is definitely up with respect to wanting to change the ballot system we've had for many years.

I can tell you, Mr Speaker, that there's something fundamentally wrong here with respect to democracy, where you can't run unless the leader signs your papers. That's what I object to with respect to this bill. I also wonder why we now want to change the ballot that has always been in place. These are fundamental issues that have been going on. Anyone who has been involved in party politics for years—we're probably going to be put in a situation very shortly, if we decide to adopt the federal riding boundaries. I put that to the members right now. If we adopt the federal riding boundaries, you're going see a number of individuals from within the same party facing off with each other because their boundaries cross. The most famous ones who went at it were Sheila Copps and Tony Valeri. There was also John Bryden in Hamilton, in that particular area, and I think down in Niagara, and there are other areas that are going to cross over. You're going to have situations where the leader says, "No, I'm not going to sign your papers. I want Gerretsen to run. You run somewhere else." That's the problem with respect to that situation.

Maybe this is leading up to the changing of the boundaries. Maybe Mr Patten is ahead of us here. He's setting the table to make sure that the leader has have the control over the system, with the blessing of the party.

I don't know why a private member is coming forth with this bill anyway. We've been promised a package of democratic renewal by the Attorney General for ages. Where is it? It's not here. We've got a member coming forth here who I would say is walking in lockstep with the leadership, making sure that the leaders are even stronger than they need to be. God knows, they're strong

enough as it is in terms of determining all the policy within this place, but to say, "I can't run unless the party leader signs my nomination papers"—I can't think of anything that's more offensive to the democratic process and the nomination process that we have in this province. When those boundary changes come and you say, "Oh, jeez, now I'm into someone else's area," don't feel so smug over there that you've got your seat, because you may not have your seat. You may be looking for another area. It may not be that easy in terms of making sure that you can get that nomination, especially if the leader won't sign your papers and says, "You'd better get over to another area; otherwise, you're not running. Thanks for your service for the last four years, and adios."

Mr Patten has put forth a bill here that I don't support. I hope nobody supports it. If you want your leader to determine your political future, you can't run and speak your mind in this House without putting your future in jeopardy come ballot time, the next time you go for the normal nomination. With respect to the party affiliation on the ballot, that has got to be looked at a lot closer, to make sure there is no gerrymandering, no situations where the public is misrepresented. The only way I can see that there's no misrepresentation is if they know who's on the ballot and they know who they're voting for.

1040

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I come to this debate with very mixed feelings about this bill, I have to tell you. There is no question that the voters have a right to know every aspect about the person who will represent them in this Legislature. They have a right to know where they live, they have a right to know their political views, they have a right to hear them, they have a right to read the literature and they also, I would suggest, have a right to know which party they represent. In that regard, this is a good thing that is being put on the ballot. It will also, I think, limit the confusion. The confusion almost always—I can't even think of a case when it hasn't revolved around the Liberal Party, because what you see is case after case of parachuted candidates who cause turmoil within the riding association, who then run as independent Liberals. I think the most clear one we saw in the last provincial election happened in Scarborough Centre in the celebrated case of Mr Duguid versus Mr Manios, which, had it not been such an overwhelming Liberal majority elected, certainly would have cost Mr Duguid and the Liberal Party that seat.

We also see that there is the problem of putting the onus on the party to act fairly, and I think this is probably the Achilles heel of this particular bill. It will vest more power in the leader and more power in the party apparatus at the upper levels to determine who gets the nod and who does not get the nod; who gets their nomination form signed and who does not. Quite frankly, I think it takes away democracy from the local riding associations.

So there are good aspects to the bill and bad aspects to the bill. I would suggest, though, that this bill isn't in fact—and I know Mr Patten has been wanting this bill for a long time. It is premature, given the commitment of the Premier and the Liberal Party in the last election to thoroughly look at how democracy takes place in this Legislature and in this province. There is a promise here of democratic reform. There is a promise here that the Attorney General will be going out to the people and we'll be seeing mechanisms that will help make this Legislature more democratic and give greater power to individual members and to the electorate that sends them here.

We need to see the entire package. This, in fact, may be one small part of the package, and, depending on how the package unfolds, it may be a good part. But we need, first of all, to underline that we respect democracy in this province.

I want to tell you—and I'm delighted that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is here today—one of the saddest days I have experienced in this Legislature was the day that the Minister of Municipal Affairs refused to recognize the democratic will of the people of Kawartha Lakes. Those people had gone through great and terrible expense and a lot of time in order to exercise their rights as electors and their rights as free and democratic people in this province. They went to the Legislature and they got the approval of the Legislature and the approval of the then Minister of Municipal Affairs to put a ministerial-sanctioned question on the municipal ballot. That question was approved, first of all, by the minister. Then it was vetted by the "yes" and "no" sides, who agreed on the actual wording. It was put on the municipal ballot. There were monies allowed for both sides to get their message out. The people in Kawartha Lakes voted in a democratic fashion, a great many turned out to vote, and the majority voted that they wanted to de-amalgamate their forced city.

After having gone through that entire process, they came to the minister with the results, only to have the minister say that it would cost too much money. With the greatest of respect, if the democracy of the people of this province is not respected, I don't know how any other democratic reform that is being suggested can possibly hold any water.

I went down to meet some of those people in Kawartha Lakes who had come together with people from across Ontario, people from Ottawa and Sudbury, Toronto, Flamborough, Dundas, Aldershot, and other locations as well, and there was a sense of frustration in the room. They felt that the people are not being listened to by their politicians when initiatives are put forward, when they want to have referenda, when they want to be able to have a say on how they are governed or the forms in which they are governed at a municipal level. They are simply roughshod told that it cannot happen. I hope that when the minister comes forward with his new bill that the actual democracy at the local level will be paramount.

Of course, this bill is here because there are problems with independent Liberals. I have already alluded to the great battle of Duguid versus Manios. But this again was

caused by the appointment of Mr Duguid over Mr Manios, who had for several years been signing up members, who had the support of his local riding association, who had been the previous candidate, and who saw himself shunted aside. He was not willing to accept that.

The same thing happens in other ridings and quite conceivably could happen in almost any riding. We saw what happened in Hamilton East; that has already been spoken to. There was no chance, quite literally, for people who were unhappy there to run as independent Liberals, because the nominations were closed and an hour later the by-election was called. There was no chance for the dissidents to organize.

Now, we do know that the party name on the ballot, would solve the age-old problem that we see not so much in Ontario but in Quebec, and that is people running with the same names. It is not and has not been unusual in Quebec to see people with identical names on the ballot, with nothing to differentiate, in the past, which party they belonged to or whether one was an independent and one was running on behalf of a party. It was very common to find that someone with an identical name was brought in to run in those circumstances.

Also, in Toronto we saw an incumbent, Mr Peter Tabuns, who is presently the NDP representative federally in the riding that I represent, lose the municipal election when a person was parachuted in with the name Larry Tabin and was able to garner off just the number of votes to make sure that he lost the seat. That's in the days when the top two were elected. He came third, and Larry Tabin had more than sufficient votes to have made up the difference.

I have to go back to the problem here. The problem is that the leader's signature will give even more authority to the leader to parachute candidates, and we have seen the Liberals very famous for that both federally and provincially. I might suggest, if this were to pass today, that you may want to amend it or have it amended in committee to include the president of the local riding association "in conjunction with"—and both signatures must be on there—the leader or agent. Because if you leave it solely in the hands of the leader and/or his or her agent, then you are going to set up a system that we are trying to get away from.

The real problems here, I would suggest, which must be dealt with by the Attorney General, are proportional representation and the freedom of members of this House to vote however they wish except in matters of confidence and the budget, so that it doesn't matter if you vote against your party; the government would not fall, and you would see a great many backbench government members not toeing the party line, especially on bad law. We need to give power to our committees, and most of all we need to give power to the democratic nomination process that would render all of this somewhat moot.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): C'est avec plaisir que je viens appuyer mon collègue d'Ottawa-Centre et un projet de loi qui ne fait certainement pas sa première apparition dans cette assemblée.

Nous sommes maintenant plus de 12,5 millions de citoyens et citoyennes en Ontario. Nous avons beaucoup de nouveaux arrivés. Les nouveaux arrivés ne connaissent pas toujours les candidats locaux, nouveaux arrivés, parfois, qui ne parlent que la langue russe, asiatique, arabe, qui ne peuvent pas lire notre langue canadienne.

Laissez-moi vous dire que j'ai vécu l'expérience personnellement dans le passé lorsque les mêmes noms ont apparu sur le bulletin. En 1999, par exemple, mon opposant était un autre Lalonde, et on était censé avoir un troisième Lalonde sur le bulletin. Mais dans ce temps-là j'ai approché le directeur en chef d'Élections Ontario pour regarder s'il n'y avait pas une possibilité de rajouter le nom du parti. Il m'a dit, « Monsieur Lalonde, ne procédez pas à changer votre nom », parce que j'étais sur le point de faire changer mon nom à Jean-Marc Libéral Lalonde. Nous savons que chacun des partis politiques a un programme. Les nouveaux arrivés en Ontario qui ne connaissent pas les candidats vont se baser sur le programme électoral du parti.

1050

J'ai vécu de belles expériences aussi dans la dernière élection. Sur la frontière de deux circonscriptions, j'avais un Lalonde sur le côté de Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh et j'avais un Lalonde sur l'autre côté de la rue, qui était moi. Je peux dire que, du fait qu'on n'avait pas le nom du parti sur le bulletin, j'étais avantagé parfois, et c'était parfois désavantageux.

Laissez-moi vous dire que j'ai eu la chance de voyager à travers le monde comme observateur d'élections. La dernière observation pour laquelle j'étais envoyé par les Nations Unies avec une équipe de résidents de différents pays, je me suis rendu au Cambodge. Au Cambodge, nous avions 43 partis politiques. Ce n'est pas les noms des candidats qui apparaissent sur les bulletins, ce sont les noms des partis, puisque les gens ne peuvent pas connaître les candidats.

Mais nous ici, on devrait regarder peut-être un peu différemment.

J'ai de bons exemples ici qui démontrent que parfois nous ajoutons le logo du parti en plus du nom du parti, qui est en caractères gras, et le nom du candidat, qui apparaît en caractères très petits. En plus de ça, nous rajoutons la photo du candidat, parce que parfois les candidats vont cogner de porte en porte et on ne peut pas se rappeler le nom du parti. Mais encore une fois, la grande importance de ça, c'est la plateforme, les politiques du parti, qui compte.

En 1999, lorsqu'est survenue l'élection, on m'a dit, « Jean-Marc, tu vas faire face encore cette fois-ci à deux autres Lalonde. Il faudra participer le plus tôt possible à apporter des changements à l'Assemblée législative. » Savez-vous, monsieur le Président, que nous sommes la seule province au Canada où le nom du parti politique n'apparaît pas sur le bulletin? Aussi récemment qu'hier, nous avons fait des recherches. Nous sommes la seule province au Canada où le nom du parti n'apparaît pas sur le bulletin.

Nous avons même la région du Yukon, qui n'est pas une province, mais un territoire: le nom du parti apparaît sur le bulletin. Les deux seuls autres territoires qui n'ont pas le nom du parti, c'est parce que nous n'avons pas de parti politique à l'intérieur de ces deux territoires. Ce sont le territoire du Nord-Ouest et le territoire du Nunavut. Ce sont les deux seuls dans le Canada actuellement qui n'ont pas le nom du parti sur le bulletin.

Mais j'ai été plus loin. Lorsque je me suis rendu au Vermont, aux États-Unis, on m'a démontré que oui, encore là, le nom du parti apparaît très clairement sur le bulletin. J'ai regardé en Australie, par exemple : le nom du parti apparaît plus gras que le nom du candidat. Si je regarde un pays asiatique, nous avons encore là le nom du parti qui apparaît.

Puis, pourquoi ici en Ontario ne pouvons-nous pas avoir le nom du parti?

J'ai été encore plus loin. Sur 62 pays que j'ai ici devant moi, tous les noms des partis apparaissent en premier lieu au lieu de celui du candidat, ce qui démontre encore clairement l'importance que le citoyen, le votant, va aller appuyer la politique d'un parti. Si je regarde ici-même à Toronto, nous avons parfois quatre ou cinq circonscriptions différentes qui font face à une autre circonscription. Je pourrais vous raconter très longuement de mon expérience dans le passé, mais je vais donner la chance à d'autres de mes collègues.

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I'm proud today to stand in support of Bill 76 and to support my colleague from Ottawa Centre. A question was put forth in the House today as to why Mr Patten was putting forth this bill. Well, first of all, Mr Patten has a bright idea. He has a bright idea that builds on what we campaigned on, that being democratic renewal.

He also presented something in the House today that builds on something that I, throughout my career in education, supported and encouraged in young people, and especially students. When my colleague from Ottawa Centre today introduced Mr Bernardi to the House, it was exciting to see education in action, from a proposal that he put forth that the member from Ottawa Centre could bring into the House. I saw exactly what I had encouraged my students to do.

Before I forget, I would like to say too that I am giving a minute of my time to my colleague opposite from Lanark-Carleton.

I would also like to say that the amendments to section 27 in the bill seem to have created a little consternation and some problems across the House here. The member from Erie-Lincoln mentioned that there's danger in this section. I see no danger at all. This bill has nothing to do with the nomination process, a process that I remember going through in November 2001, when I would have been excited and proud to have had my leader's endorsement on the nomination paper. It's just asking for a signature on the paper. I don't see it as any more than that. It endorses. It doesn't reflect in any way on a process to get there.

I also would like to say that with regard to this being premature—this was a comment by the member for Beaches-East York—I don't think it's premature at all. We did announce in the election campaign that we wanted democratic renewal. It has already been mentioned in the House by the Honourable Michael Bryant and by his parliamentary assistant, Caroline Di Cocco, from Sarnia-Lambton, and we will bring into this House the processes that will make it very clear how we want to reform democracy in this province.

If I have anything to say here, I'm proud of the fact that the member from Ottawa Centre has jumped the queue a bit, jumped into the process and given this House the chance to vote and express their thoughts on a bill that's going to modernize democracy. It's going to give a chance to those people, for example, in Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, who had confusion in the last election. We just had that mentioned here by the honourable member and my colleague from across the boundary, from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. There was confusion there, and this will eliminate the confusion. With the name and the party on the ballot, it will eliminate that confusion.

I'm very happy to support this. I'm very happy that we had input from a constituent in this province who took the time, and I encourage other constituents to take the time, to bring something positive before their member to have endorsed here in the House.

I would like to conclude by saying that I support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a tiny bit of housekeeping: Do we have unanimous consent for the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh to give a minute to the member from Lanark-Carleton? Agreed. Thank you.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Thank you very much. I appreciate the bipartisan offer.

I want to indicate my support for Mr Patten's bill. This is not a new idea. This is an idea that has been around a long time. Face it, folks: People in this province and in Canada vote first on the basis of a leader; second, on the basis of a party; and third, on the basis of the candidate. We'd all like to believe that they're voting for Norm Sterling, Richard Patten or whoever.

The only way you can find out the party affiliation is to go and look at a list and then match the name with the list. This is about information, informing the voter as to who he's electing and what party he's affiliated with. Therefore, I support the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Mr Patten, you have two minutes to reply.

1100

Mr Patten: I want to thank everybody who participated in this debate this morning. I'd like to thank my colleagues for their support and for the points that were raised.

There was a point raised relating to the authorization of the party leader, or his or her agent. This is already required under the Election Finances Act, so it doesn't change anything.

What some members seem to be concerned about is when leaders have the opportunity to nominate members in their particular parties. Some parties have it; some don't. We have a very limited access, where our leader has the opportunity to do that in five ridings only, and for other parties it's all ridings etc.

What this is attempting to do is that if we're going to have party affiliation on the ballot, we have that authorized by the party, by an authorized signatory. It could be the leader or his or her agent. The member for Beaches-East York suggested that perhaps it should be the leader and the president of the party. I like that suggestion. I have no trouble with that suggestion. That would be a very good suggestion that I would certainly entertain in committee that might deal with the worry or the fear.

However, having studied the bill, having looked at this, this does not add anything new to the act. It's just that when you put a party affiliation down, how do you distinguish between people saying, "I'm running for the New Democrats," and "No, I'm running for the New Democrats"? Obviously, we need to have somebody with authority in the party as a signatory and who can speak on behalf of the party, and that is the leader or his or her agent. That's all that really is. So some of the cynicism about this propagating some sense of strengthening the leader's role really does not hold water upon examination.

I want to wind up by saying that for sure this is simply a small step along the bigger and longer road to democratic reform, but I hope the House might consider this as a signal that we collectively support democratic reform, and one way in which we can do that is by supporting this bill today.

KEVIN'S LAW (CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2004

LOI KEVIN DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Mr Jackson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 78, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act to better protect the children of Ontario / Projet de loi 78, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et la Loi sur les coroners pour mieux protéger les enfants de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr Jackson, you have 10 minutes to lead off.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): Today is an important day. Private members' time is the time when we as MPPs have an opportunity to express strong feelings about issues that are of concern to us and, in particular, of concern to our constituents. Members of the House will know that for my 20 years here, I've had occasion to sit in this position and present bills of justice reform and victims' rights on at least 20 different occasions.

Today, I'm proud to present this amendment to the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act. However, as in every other case, I wish I wasn't presenting this bill. I wish Ontario was as safe as it could be for children and those in care in this province and that this bill was not necessary. However, the tragic events of earlier this year and late last year have necessitated coming forward with this bill.

Members have a copy of the bill. It's on record. They will know that should this bill pass, there will be an automatic coroner's inquest when a child dies from a Criminal Code offence while in the care of a parent who is or has been the subject of supervised access. The bill will also specifically permit the use of the victims' justice fund to cover the costs of legal counsel for the crime victim's family at any one of these inquests.

Earlier today, the mother of Kevin Latimer, Jenny Latimer; her mother, Marjorie Latimer, Kevin's grandmother; and their spiritual counsel, Canon Michael Bird of St Luke's Anglican Church, delivered a letter to the Premier's office expressing concerns and the importance of proceeding with this bill. They are present in the House today, for the members; they wished to be here. Kevin's grandfather, Kevin Latimer, and his brother, Liam, are watching today's proceedings on television.

Kevin Latimer was just three days short of his second birthday when he died in his sleep on February 2, 2004. It was a quiet end to a troubled life. Five months earlier, Kevin plunged out of a third-storey window of his father's apartment. He landed broken and crunched on a patch of earth below. His spinal cord was injured. The toddler would never walk again. Only his spirits weren't broken as he clung on to life. His father is charged with criminal negligence causing bodily harm and will appear in Hamilton court on June 15.

During the spring of 2002, shortly after Kevin was born, Jenny Latimer took her sons, Liam and Kevin, to Halton Women's Shelter. According to Jenny, "We had been living with constant verbal, emotional and physical abuse from the boys' father. He had even threatened my life and it was time to get the boys to safety." Kevin's father has also been charged with four counts of assault and one count of uttering threats, and in July a judge in Halton will hear those charges.

When Jenny first made her application to the courts to protect her children and herself, the father was granted supervised access. Within a few months, however, this order was changed to grant supervised access outside the jurisdiction where the mother and family live. The family has been devastated by the tragic loss of such an innocent and loving child, and they are confused and angry at a court system and a child protection system that, in their opinion, did not protect them. They want answers to questions and, I stress, most of all they do not want any other family to have to experience this pain and horror.

The purpose of a coroner's inquest is to give a voice to the departed. This bill will also give a voice to the family.

I wish to put on the record some of the comments of the impact statement from the family. Jenny Latimer wrote:

"My name is Jenny Latimer and I am a 24-year-old mom who gave birth to two beautiful and healthy boys. Last summer we had many laughs. We shared incredible treasured memories: Kevin's first step, Liam's first time catching a fish...."

These were all important moments in this family, as they started.

"During the spring of 2002, shortly after Kevin was born, Liam and Kevin and I went to a shelter for abused mothers and their children. We had been living with constant verbal, emotional and physical abuse from the boys' father. He had even threatened my life and it was time to get my boys to safety.

"A few months later, along with the Children's Aid Society recommendations, the father was granted an unsupervised visitation with the boys. He was to attend a six-week men's group for anger management and have a psychiatric evaluation. It was alleged to have been completed mid-December 2002. January 2003, he started, slowly, having unsupervised visits....

"Kevin fell out of his father's attic apartment window through a broken screen. We later learned that both my boys had been seen on numerous occasions throwing clothing through the tattered screen, with no signs of their father. Neighbours had warned him of the danger. I had no knowledge of these events until after the accident occurred.... Liam saw Kevin fall from the window. He laid on the gravel below, conscious and crying and Liam saw this. Liam, to this day, constantly speaks about Kevin falling out of the window. He has been traumatized by what he has seen. This is too much for any child, let alone a four-year-old boy.

"Kevin fractured his neck in two place and he suffered a spinal cord injury. He was paralyzed from the neck down with some shoulder movement and elbow movement, but had no feeling. We could not or did not want to believe that Kevin would never walk again," and the mother dedicated every hour to his rehabilitation. He remained in hospital until a week before Christmas, when he finally was able to be brought home.

"Kevin touched many hearts. This law will continue to touch many more and continue to make his mommy proud.

"I love my children with all my heart. Unfortunately, nothing will bring my precious child back but Kevin's Law can stop the hurt from happening to other children. We cannot allow innocent children to be hurt any more. Kevin's Law will save lives."

That was from Jenny Latimer, mother of Kevin Latimer.

The other thing this bill will do, besides addressing the issues of concern the family has raised, is that it will give those families standing, with funding from the victims' justice fund, before a coroner's inquest, and this is very important. It is the spirit of this legislation that was brought in by our government, and which I first tabled in this House back in 1988 when Ian Scott was our Attorney General of the day. Bill 78 would specifically permit the use of the victims' justice fund to ensure that families of victims with standing in an inquest are able to have funded counsel.

1110

We have a superb tradition in Ontario of inquests delving into systemic issues that contribute to the deaths of individuals, and consequential recommendations coming from those inquests have helped make our province and country a safer place to live in. Too often in the past, while public agencies involved are present with publicly funded counsel, victims' families are forced to scrape together money to participate effectively. It is a gross injustice to inflict such a burden on the people whose family member died and from whose death we seek knowledge for the public good. Bill 78 will end that injustice once and for all.

I say with all sincerity to my friend the current Attorney General of Ontario, who himself has a deserved reputation as an advocate for victims of crime, to put this money to the use that was intended, so it is helping crime victims and not sitting in a bank account while victims need help. So many times in the past, he and his party, and all members of this House, have spoken of the need to improve support and assistance for victims in our province. I urge all members to support Bill 78, as this will ensure standing for these families. It will allow the funds from the justice fund to be dedicated to their essential initial purposes as designed by legislators and approved in this House.

This is a very difficult issue in our community, because Kevin went through such tragedy for the four and a half months he clung to life. The family has been through an awful lot, and there are many questions. This bill is not about a witch hunt of the children's aid society or any other group. Children's aid has struggled under budget constraints and various other challenges, and we want to support our children's aids in Ontario. However, there are so many questions that remain unanswered in this case. We are hopeful that through this legislation we will be able to have a coroner's inquest.

I look forward to the debate in the House this morning, and I encourage all members to open their hearts and support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to debate Bill 78. From the onset, I think it would be very appropriate to indicate my support for the bill and make it very clear that the member's reputation is well known. I spoke with the member and was very glad to hear that it was a very specific and well-written bill that speaks to the issue of child protection. I want to compliment the member on the fact that it is doing that.

The second thing I want to do—actually I should have done it first—is offer my sympathies and condolences to the Latimer family and those who are staying around to help them through this period.

These are the times when we have an opportunity, as legislators, to put the signs away. We just heard about

logos in elections. This is a time when we want to remove those logos. Private members' time is specific. Private members' time is for us, as legislators, to look, listen and hear the ideas of members in this House and, indeed, things that affect each other outside this House. I want to compliment the member for doing that, because that's exactly what this is supposed to be about: bringing forward legislation and ideas for legislation that require us to put away those partisan signs and start dealing with the issues that are very important to the people of our communities.

I'm glad to hear the member say this is not a swipe at CAS's. I, for one, am very proud of the CAS in my riding, which, as a matter of fact, has set provincial standards in terms of how they care for children, and yet they still have people questioning what they're doing. Why? Because they're dealing with children. That's the key here.

In my 25 years as an educator, I unfortunately had to deal with CAS cases; I had to deal with children being abused. That's why I stand in my place today and look the member in the eye and say, "Good for you." I'm glad you're bringing forward the type of legislation that's necessary to look to the care, concern and love we need to show for our children. That is the future; that is the present. We have to make sure we understand that we can't allow these things to continue. I applaud the bravery of the family for issuing in their statements that they wish this not to happen to anyone else. That tells me about the type of people we're dealing with in terms of the actual loss of a family member, their own child, and they take the next step immediately and say they don't want this to happen to anyone else. I'm truly moved, and I compliment the family for that ability. It's a very difficult thing to do.

In terms of the member's bill, I absolutely support it. I will work however I can alongside the member and do whatever I can to move that forward. He knows as well as I do, probably better than I do, that in terms of how the process works, this needs to get to committee. We will be moving it to the justice and social policy committee, an appropriate place to put this bill. As he knows, very few pieces of legislation in this place don't need tweaking or questions answered, and this is an appropriate place to put it, because we will then be able to have more people spend their voices on it.

Private members' time is not enough. We don't have enough time to actually debate this type of legislation. I believe there are some things in the bill that may parallel something that's already in existence. The one point the member taught me a little bit about, which I thought was a good idea, is that there are protections and reporting mechanisms for the first 12 months before apprehension but nothing after apprehension. I think that's another area we can improve upon, and I like that's where the bill is going as well.

The good things about this bill far outweigh any kind of nuances that can be discovered in committee. The direction is pure, the direction is important, and it's an important message that we send to the rest of the communities in Ontario, to the families out there who are still going through these types of things.

As I said earlier, I went through this process as a principal in an elementary school, and fortunately there wasn't this end result. But tragically, it has happened in other places in this province, and we need the type of legislation that is being proposed by the honourable member to move forward and continue to ask the question: What else can we do to protect our children? I challenge us all to put aside anything else and focus on the concept of what we can do to protect our children. If we keep that in our hearts and minds, the legislative process can be overcome and we will produce legislation that's necessary for the protection of our children.

These are the types of things that some people will stand up and say, "You've regulated me out of existence; I can't take any more regulations." I would ask you to consider this: I'll take whatever regulation is necessary to protect the life of a child. I challenge us all to keep that in our hearts and minds when we make that decision. I congratulate the honourable member, and I support him in his attempt to get this bill passed.

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): It is with some degree of sadness that I join in this debate on Bill 78, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act to better protect the children of Ontario, but I want to commend the member for Burlington for bringing this forward. The short title of the bill is Kevin's Law, and based on the information I've seen, which was provided to me by the member, I want to extend my condolences to Kevin's entire family. Our hearts go out to them, and our thoughts and prayers are with them.

The member for Burlington has written to all MPPs in the Legislature and outlined the purpose of Bill 78:

"The bill amends the Child and Family Services Act.

"If a children's aid society applies to a court for an order under the act respecting access to a child by a parent of the child and the court makes the order, the court on making the order is required to specify the supervision to which the access is subject if the parent has been charged with or convicted of an offence under the Criminal Code (Canada) involving an act of violence against the child or the other parent of the child.

"A person or children's aid society that obtains information that a child has died shall report the information to the Minister of Children and Youth Services if a court made an order under the act denying access to the child by a parent of the child or making the access subject to supervision, if, on the application of a children's aid society, a court varied the order to grant the access or to make it no longer subject to supervision and if the child subsequently died as a result of a criminal act while in the custody or charge of the parent. The minister shall report the information to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services who administers the Coroners Act. That minister shall direct a coroner to hold an inquest into the death.

"If the coroner in an inquest into the death of a victim as defined in the Victims' Bill of Rights, 1995 designates a spouse, same-sex partner or parent of the victim as a person with standing at the inquest, the person may apply to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to have the costs that the person incurs for representation by legal counsel in connection with the inquest paid from the victims' justice fund account."

1120

At the outset of my remarks, I want to indicate to this House that I will be supporting this bill in principle. Again, I commend the member for Burlington for bringing it forward. I know that in his letter to MPPs, the MPP for Burlington informed us that the official motto of the office of the chief coroner of Ontario is, "We speak for the dead to protect the living."

The member for Burlington, who reminds us that he has raised the matter of victims' justice through private members' initiatives in the past—and who continues to do so compassionately, yet forcefully, here today—should be commended for repeating the coroner's motto. I'd say he's right, in the sense that we, the living, need to be vigilant and speak for children who have died, so that others may be protected from injustice and violence.

I believe we need to uphold the highest standards of justice, while our objectives as MPPs must be in the very best interest of children. So I'm grateful to be able to speak to the principles that are inherent in this bill, and to do so as the Conservative spokesperson for children and youth services. I would be remiss, however, if I did not mention some of the things we have done, and things we must do in other realms, in other spheres of our activity, to improve the lives of children in Ontario.

Recently, I spoke in this House about KidsAbility, formerly the Rotary Children's Centre, a children's treatment centre that provides services for children with disabilities in my riding of Waterloo-Wellington. I spoke on behalf of other treatment centres like it across the province. In my statement to the Legislature and my follow-up to the minister, I demanded that funding for KidsAbility, which serves children with cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, Down syndrome and communications disorders, be increased.

I should remind the House that I said at that time that if the budget didn't address the concerns that had been brought to my attention and, in turn, the House's attention, this government would demonstrate not a compassionate heart but a heart as cold as ice. I also remind members that it was the Liberal Party, now in government, that during the last election sold itself to the people of Ontario as the compassionate choice. While there was a fleeting reference to children's treatment centres in the budget, there apparently was no increased operating funding announced in the budget for children's treatment centres, with the exception of some new funding for children's mental health programs.

I'll say again: Unless the funding crisis that KidsAbility is facing is addressed by the government, the number of children on the waiting list who need treatment could increase to as many as 1,335, according to a recent report in the K-W Record. I'm sure all members of this House would consider that unacceptable.

I recall that the KidsAbility motto is "These kids can't wait." I agree; they shouldn't. I expect to hear something soon from the minister that are these kids will be a priority for the provincial government.

I also need to mention my Bill 77, when I have the chance to do so again. I can't imagine why a government that obviously wants to protect children travelling in motor vehicles would not want to at least be consistent and fair with parents and families. Why would they not provide the same provincial retail sales tax exemption for booster seats for older children, which they are forcing tens of thousands of parents to buy—the same retail sales tax exemption they provide on seats for younger children, whose car seats are exempt from the 8% retail sales tax?

There is still hope that the appropriate funding will be forthcoming for KidsAbility. I would urge the government to treat parents fairly and equitably and not tax booster seats they are compelling parents to buy.

The fact that I have to state these things again is somewhat frustrating in itself. The government made a promise not to cut taxes. Seven months later, they are raising taxes. The same can be said for their promise not to run a deficit in government or add to the debt, both of which, unfortunately, they have indicated they will do right up until the year 2008, adding to the debt every year.

As we debate Bill 78 today, I could go on and on about promises that have not been kept, like the broken promise to hundreds of autistic children and their families to provide intensive behavioural intervention therapy beyond the age of six—a commitment that the Premier made to a parent, in writing, just before the election.

I do want to allow other members time to add their voices to the debate Bill 78, so I will conclude my remarks. I will close by saying again, as I did just after the budget, that I think the Liberal government has seriously damaged its credibility by breaking promises that it made during the election campaign. To be constructive, I hope that the government will do the right thing for children and their families, to protect them and their rights and provide any assistance needed to reach their full potential in life. Once again, I encourage all members of this House to support the member for Burlington's Bill 78.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm pleased to speak to the bill. Obviously, as my friends before me have said, the aim of the proposed bill is to enhance child protection, and I commend the member for his efforts in this regard.

I do want to comment that it is unfortunate that the member for Waterloo-Wellington debased the debate on this important piece of legislation by bringing in partisan politics when private members' time is an opportunity for all of us to come together and meet some of the significant challenges that we face in this province.

As someone who has worked tirelessly for many years to better protect children from abuse, I know that there is much more we can do to protect children. This proposed bill is in response to a specific tragedy, I understand, which is now before the courts. I don't want to speak to specifics to that case in any way to jeopardize it, but I do want to express my deepest sympathies to the family, which, I understand, is in the Legislature today. I want to applaud them for their bravery in coming forward and talking publicly about a tragedy that has occurred in their lives. Just to come out and speak publicly about these issues is very difficult, but it is by coming together and speaking publicly about these issues and working together, without regard for partisan politics, that I think we can all be proud of the work we accomplish to protect children and their families in this province.

I want to speak for a moment about a similar family and circumstance in my own community, about a mother as brave as the one in this room today. My own community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore was struck by the tragedy of the murder of Farah Khan a number of years ago. Our community came together, from all backgrounds, all types of people, to grieve for a little girl—at that time, we did not even know her name. We didn't know where she had come from, we didn't know why she had been murdered, and we had no understanding of the issues that were before the community. We came together and we grieved with the police officers who had found Farah.

We came together at an organization that I've been involved with for a number of years called the Gatehouse, which also works for the protection of children to ensure they're not revictimized in these tragic circumstances. The Gatehouse is a fantastic organization that helps children who have been abused by not further victimizing them when they're coming forward and telling their stories. It's a gingerbread house on the Lakeshore. It's called the Gatehouse because it's the old psychiatric hospital gatehouse on the Lakeshore. It is an example of a community coming together to deal with the issue of child abuse. The community joined together and renovated this wonderful old facility. It looks like you're entering your grandmother's house, but in fact what you're doing is coming into a state-of-the-art videotape facility where the CAS and police interview children so they're able to tell their stories in a comfortable surrounding. At the Gatehouse the social workers assist the family in dealing with tragic and difficult circumstances, such as those of this family.

The Gatehouse, being near where Farah's family came from, reached out at that time and recognized that we also had a role to play in the community. We also needed to help families grieve. This past week, we joined together again at the Gatehouse, and I have to tell you, I met another very brave woman that day. The mother of Farah Khan joined us this past weekend to put in Farah's garden. As someone who has been working in this field for many years, you don't become hardened, but you perhaps become a little less emotional. I can tell you, as I spoke to Farah's mother across the garden that day and thanked her for coming forward and keeping the issue of keeping children safe in the front of all of our minds, I was very emotional. It was a very overwhelming day to work with that family.

Needing this to be a public response and needing us to work together in community is an example of what we try to bring together in our own community at the Gatehouse to support families who are coming forward, taking those brave acts and saying, "Let's talk publicly about this issue and let's work together."

1130

Last evening I had another incredible and interesting opportunity as I joined with my community again in Etobicoke-Lakeshore to conduct a community safety audit. We've had, unfortunately, some incidents of sexual assault in our community over the last year, and we selected one of the areas in the Mabelle-Cordova area in my riding, if you're familiar—the Islington-Dundas area. We joined with METRAC on the night they were launching their community safety audits. The message we were talking about in our community was, you need to look after each other. You need to pay attention to what's happening to your neighbour, to your neighbour's children.

These are the very issues that I think this brave family is trying to bring forward and have us talk about in the Legislature today. If we could only have had the information that was available, that other neighbours knew, that they had been cognizant of. We have to look out for our neighbours' children. We should not live insular lives.

In conducting our community safety audit last night, we walked about the community and talked to families. We said, "Do you feel safe here at night? Do you feel that your neighbours are watching out for you?" I have to say, one of the most invigorating statements I heard from one of the mothers was, "It's unfortunate that these terrible incidents happened in our community, but do you know what they did? They opened our eyes to the fact that we need to look out for one another. We need to pay attention to what's happening to our neighbour and our neighbour's children." Speaking publicly and doing these things are ways that we will be able to better protect children and their families.

This government is working on the issue of protecting children. The creation of a new children's ministry and a minister who is compassionate and caring about the well-being of children in our society is a good first step. The good work that the coroner has done in all sorts of areas can provide sound and good advice to the government.

In the area of domestic violence, we've taken a leadership role and started talking about children and how children are affected by domestic violence. Our significant campaign that we will be undertaking is to focus on children. The funds that we've made available on second-stage housing will help children, because it is only by breaking the cycle of violence that you can protect those children, and there is so much more to do.

Obviously, as my friends before me have said, there are some issues with this legislation and the format that

it's proposed in, whether we need to acknowledge that there may be some duplication, that we might be stepping on the toes of the coroner, who already does wonderful and great work. But at its heart we can all come together in the recognition that we want to take this forward and move it, because we need to make sure that women and their children are safe and that our society responds to those needs.

I'm very pleased to have had a chance to speak to the issue. I thank the family for joining us here today, and I thank you for your bravery in continuing to bring this issue forward to all of us.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm pleased to speak on the member from Burlington's bill this morning. This is a very tragic and serious matter.

I'd just like to say, initially, that the member from Burlington, as we all know, has been a long-time advocate of crime victims in Ontario. He was the author of the original Victims' Bill of Rights, which he presented three times to the Ontario Legislature before it was ultimately enacted by the Harris government in 1996.

The bill created a special victims' justice fund to provide assistance to crime victims, and was subsequently amended to create Canada's first office for victims of crime. Bill 78 is a continuation of the member's commitment to helping victims of crime in this province. I've been pleased to serve with him since 1995.

Certainly, the issue today is gaining support for Bill 78. The intent of the member is for it to proceed to the standing committee on justice and social policy. The intent of the bill, after that review by the committee—I imagine it would be a very extensive review before it comes for third reading. Should the bill pass, there will be an automatic coroner's inquest when a child dies from a Criminal Code offence while in the care of a parent who is or has been the subject of supervised parental access. The bill would also specifically permit the use of the victim's justice fund to cover the costs of legal counsel for a crime victim's family at the inquest.

Being here today in the presence of the family, in this situation, I just hold out my respect for them. I'm the father of a six-year-old. I know that young boys are very active, very special, and a situation for one to be snuffed out at the age of two is really a tragedy that no one can speak of, other than the family of a young child they had great hopes for and loved very much.

Bill 78 is named in Kevin Latimer's memory. The call for an automatic coroner's inquest is a call for justice. It's a call for a voice for the person who has died. It's a complex issue. The supervisory system we have with respect to family matters in this province needs review, coordination and support, not only from our court system but from the support services that are out there with respect to dealing with children.

Unsupervised access: The purpose of it is to make sure the child is protected. That is the most important issue in terms of putting the child's rights first. The nub of this bill, from what I think member Jackson has put forth, is the protection of the child. The child's rights have to be put first, without exception.

I can tell you that in the process of a private member's bill, it can go through the House very quickly if the will of the House is there, if there's seriousness given to the particular issue. Coroners' inquests are very serious matters. The nice thing about this is that it's linked to the Victims' Bill of Rights and gives them some power, some standing at the inquest. It gives them some fairness and gives victims the rights they deserve in connection with a matter such as this. I can say that very clearly.

I know that member Jackson has some further comments he wants to bring from the family. I'm giving my time in recognition of that, because I know that member Jackson has done a great amount of work on this. This is a very tight bill. It's well drafted. There may or may not be amendments, depending on what the Attorney General's office or the minister of public security have.

I will be voting in support of it.

1140

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): At the outset, I must state that we will be supporting this bill and I commend the member for Burlington for his work on behalf of children everywhere.

This is a tough time, I am sure, for Kevin's mother, grandmother and extended family. The death of a child is one of the most difficult things we face as human beings. Seeing the pain in their eyes, knowing the struggles they have gone through and will continue to go through, we must each one of us try to put ourselves in their position and try to say what we would do or what we can do to make things better.

What this bill is attempting to do is very simple. There are two phases to it. The first is that there would be an automatic coroner's inquest whenever a child died in such circumstances. At present there is not such an automatic coroner's inquest. It is discretionary and it is held when, according to the coroner, the facts might warrant it. I believe we must adopt a higher standard, and I think the standard that Mr Jackson, the member for Burlington, has put forward is appropriate.

Every child's death must concern us. We must never accept that an accident might merely happen. Of course, they do happen. But when a child is in care, when a child is under supervision, when a parent has been blocked access in the past or when there is potential criminal wrongdoing, we as a society have an obligation to make sure that every aspect is looked at and that no stone is left unturned. If there are changes to be made, and that is the ultimate result of a coroner's inquest, then they should be made with a very fine eye and diligence to make sure that what happens to one child never happens to any other.

The second aspect of the bill, which also must be commended, is the victim's justice fund, where the legal costs of the crime victims' family at inquest are covered. These can be lengthy. The costs can be horrendous, especially in a family circumstance such as that of Kevin's mother, who was forced to leave home to go and live in a shelter and who was at home caring for the remaining child. The costs may end up being prohibitive.

This is true of many families in our province, not just this one. I would think that this aspect of the bill, which assures a guaranteed fund for legal representation for the family so that they know justice is not only done, but is seen to be done, is of paramount importance.

As a society, we have for too long turned a blind eye to familial abuse. We have turned a blind eye when children have been abused by their parents or by those in positions of respect or authority. We have pretended that it did not happen, and I think we ourselves are a little to blame. We know there is a great amount of spousal abuse, and we are starting to learn more and more that there is also child abuse, which can be physical, mental, sexual and in any other psychological form.

In the past, prior to coming to this Legislature, I had the privilege and honour of serving with the Toronto Children's Aid Society for a number of years, both as the mayor of East York and later as the representative from the new megacity of Toronto. I also had the honour, for some four years, of sitting as the city of Toronto representative on the board of directors of the Toronto Child Abuse Centre.

To sit on those boards is to know how very precarious the lives of some children are, to see first-hand how children are abused by their parents, how children are abused by people in positions of authority, how they are abused by those under whom they are put in care. It is trite to say that those organizations do the very best they can possibly do, often with limited funds, often with insufficient staff and often having to weigh the needs of the child versus the needs of the parents versus the rights people have in our society. I cast no umbrage on them or on anyone who works for them or on any society in Ontario. But mistakes do happen, and those institutions have often been at the forefront of helping us to understand how to make sure that we can learn from those mistakes and that things can change.

We know in this society that people in positions of trust, like the father of Kevin and in fact many people who have access through court orders, can abuse that trust, whether they abuse the trust by taking violence upon the spouse or child or whether they do it, as in this case, possibly by neglect. We know in our society that there have been many institutions that have been put in positions of trust. We can think most clearly of the residential schools to which many of our native children were sent, to which many children were sent from broken families, who would go there, hopefully, to get an education but who got far more than that. They have had a history and a lifetime of abuse. We also know that shrines like Maple Leaf Gardens, where young men went to worship their hockey heroes, ended up in part, to some of them at least, being places of abuse over the years.

Mr Jackson has put forward a very important bill. What he is asking is that the bill be passed here today, and I am absolutely confident it will be. I hope it is unanimous. But he has also suggested that it needs to go to the committee on justice and social policy, which is appropriate. That committee will have an opportunity to look at this well-drafted bill and hopefully to make the necessary amendments and to give the necessary monies available to make sure the bill does what it is supposed to do.

It will also be an opportunity, and I think a first opportunity, for many people who are in positions with which this government entrusts them—children's aid societies and others—to see the bill. We know this bill has not been widely circulated to them. We got an opportunity to speak to the executive director of the Sudbury-Manitoulin Children's Aid Society, who had not had an opportunity until just this week to have a look at the bill. They are generally supportive of it, as you would expect them to be. They are asking that there be an opportunity to read it further and to make any appropriate amendments to the bill at the time of committee. They are also suggesting that there needs to be clarification about particular sections that would be amended. He is looking at pages two and three of the bill, around the Child and Family Services Act.

We welcome that opportunity. We support the bill today on second reading. We will continue to work with Mr Jackson and all those who are supportive of this bill to make sure that what happened to Kevin, that what has happened to other children in Ontario, comes an end. The coroner has a responsibility to give us that advice. We thank Mr Jackson for giving us the opportunity to debate the bill here today.

1150

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): Often when people rise in the House they say it's a pleasure. It certainly is no pleasure to rise today. I think we all wish this debate was not taking place, but I do commend the member from Burlington for bringing the issue forward. It's an issue that I think needs our full attention.

I'd also at this time like to extend my personal thanks to Kevin's mother and grandmother for their courage in being able to be sit with us today as this bill is debated.

Like the member for Beaches-East York, I was a board member of the children's aid society in Halton for 12 years and served for three years as president. In a role such as that, you see the best and the worst of society. You see some of the things that people are capable of, you see some of the situations that young people and children in our province are forced to live in and you wonder how that is still able to take place in our society today. But you also see some of the best parts of society. You see where people are prepared to step forward. You see where people are prepared to fund organizations, to volunteer for organizations, to try to work on behalf of children in this province.

We try to give children's aid societies around the province the tools to do the job. We give them those tools in certain ways. Obviously, one of the ways we do it is to fund those societies. Another way we do it is to employ forms of legislation that these societies must follow. Quite often we rely on the best judgement of the people employed by the societies, who I think for the most part do a tremendous job on our behalf. The societies are con-

stantly under stress. The societies are constantly dealing with situations of neglect that most of us could not imagine.

Children's aid societies themselves, oddly enough, are a recent phenomenon in our society. What many people don't know is that their formation was actually based on the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. We had institutions in place that protected animals before we had organizations to protect children in our society.

We talk about putting children first, and to me this is a perfect opportunity for us, as a Legislature, together in a unanimous fashion, falling behind the primary work of the member from Burlington, to show that we truly do put children first, to show that we can remove discretion, to show that the inquest would become an automatic outfall of a tragic situation such as this.

I certainly would ask you to support the bill moving forward. Some people have suggested improvements to the bill, ways it could perhaps be amended so that its implementation would be easier. I'm positive the member from Burlington will support those amendments when they come. In fact, he has already welcomed them.

The fact that it would move to an automatic inquest is something we can learn from. It's something we're able to use to prevent the type of tragedy that befell this family that has joined us here today from ever happening again. Inquests, as painful as they are to go through, are instructive. They tell you what to do in the future to avoid some of the tragedies that have happened in our society in the past. It gives us hope for the future. It allows us to see, to ask, how could this situation have been avoided, how could this family not have had to go through what they're going through today, and basically, how could Kevin still be alive today?

So I would ask that all members of the House support this bill. It's a worthy bill. It speaks to the best of our society. It may make a little good out of an obvious tragedy that not one of us would want to go through or that anyone we love should have to go through.

Mr Jackson: I want to thank all my colleagues in the House today, the members for Brant, Waterloo-Wellington, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Beaches-East York and my colleague from Oakville. I want to thank each and every one of you for your genuine and compassionate response. On behalf of the family, your words of support and your commitment to children's safety in our province are deeply appreciated.

Coroners' inquests are a serious matter. In my community I asked for the very first coroner's inquest 18 years ago, when four senior citizens died in one of our nursing homes. At first there wasn't going to be one. We pressured and lobbied. As a result, we found out that the legionnaires' disease they died from could have been prevented if we super-conducted all the pipes in the building.

As a result of that coroner's inquest, we do that as a matter of form in our province. We've not had a single senior die of legionnaires' disease in our institutions. By extension, we did it for all residential institutions. So the voice of the departed is a very powerful instrument for us, as legislators, as we improve the quality of life for our province.

I don't believe that we, as politicians, have a role to always be asking for them. That's why it's more than appropriate at times, especially with children, because the thing that overcame me with Kevin Latimer was that this child never had an opportunity to speak; he couldn't speak. His brother, who witnessed this horrible accident, could barely speak. But he will be able to speak through a coroner's inquest, and we will be a better province for his short, fragile and wonderful life.

I want to specifically acknowledge the presence of Jenny and her mother, Marjorie. Marjorie came to see me some months ago. She brought with her a petition. But I have to say, for those of us in public service, we create some empathy with our constituents and try to reach a common ground. I'd be remiss if I didn't admit that I grew up in a family where my mother had to bury three of her children. As my colleague from Beaches-East York put on the record, this is probably one of the cruellest things that happens to us in life as parents, and no amount of praying will ever explain how much strength we need from God when this happens. This is not unknown to a lot of families in this province. So I want to acknowledge the presence in the House today of the family.

I'm not going to read a petition into the record that the family had circulated. It dealt with a whole series of issues. It wasn't done in the appropriate form, but it captured the breadth of issues that were troubling to them as a family as they go through this horrible journey of dealing with the death of a child and determining the way in which institutions in our society, whether they be the courts or the children's aid society, were able to be of support or assistance, or lacking clear direction in terms of an understanding on the part of the family.

There are a lot of complexities in this issue, and that's why a coroner's inquest will look at the full breadth of the issues. We can look at reforms to the Child and Family Services Act, to the Coroners Act and maybe to several other acts that deal with child protection in our province.

I know the government has indicated its willingness to look at this area specifically, and I know members of the Conservative caucus look forward to those opportunities to debate that in the Legislature and participate on the justice and social policy committee of this Parliament to effect those changes.

Marjorie Latimer, the grandmother of this child, indicated in her statement—I'll just read, in closing, her comments from a rather long victim's impact statement:

"People who are abusive and neglectful come into our lives and gain control over the weak; our children are most at risk. These offenders need to know that their actions and behaviour will no longer be tolerated. Prevention needs to be the forefront and enforcement needs to be the law."

We believe that Kevin's Law will result in opportunities for us to see ways in which we can create more reforms and will give a voice to the departed. On behalf of the Latimer family, I respectfully request your support for Bill 78. I want to thank you for your support in sending it to the justice and social policy committee. Let Kevin Latimer speak to our need to better protect other children in our province. Only then can we truly believe that the smile that was so constant on this young child's face will endure in our hearts forever.

The Deputy Speaker: The time for private members' public business has expired.

ELECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI ÉLECTORALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 21.

Mr Patten has moved second reading of Bill 76, An Act to amend the Election Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

KEVIN'S LAW (CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2004
LOI KEVIN DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 22.

Mr Jackson has moved second reading of Bill 78, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act to better protect the children of Ontario.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): Mr Speaker, I respectfully request that we refer Bill 78 to the standing committee on justice and social policy.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

ELECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI ÉLECTORALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): All those in favour will stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Broten, Laurel C.	Gerretsen, John	Prue, Michael
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Sterling, Norman W.
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Patten, Richard	Yakabuski, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.
Baird, John R.	Jackson, Cameron	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 30; the nays are 8.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Mr Speaker, I respectfully suggest we refer the bill to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour, please stand.

Take your seats, please.

All those opposed will please stand.

A majority is in favour. It will be referred to the committee.

All matters having to do with private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1209 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Dalton McGuinty and this government are not only breaking promises to Ontarians, the fact is they are also breaking the law of this province. As members of this House, we have a responsibility to uphold the law of the province

In that regard, I want to put the House on notice that I have tabled a resolution today that reads as follows:

"Be it resolved that, in the opinion of this House,

1. The government of Ontario comply with section 2 of the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, that requires a referendum to be held to authorize the following provisions in a bill that receives first reading in 2004:

1. A provision that amends the Income Tax Act to establish a new tax called the Ontario health premium...."

It goes on to say that, "Despite section 17 of Bill 83 ... the government of Ontario is in contravention of the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, if a bill receives first reading that includes the provisions described in paragraph 1 before a referendum is held to authorize those provisions.

We are going to debate this resolution in this House. I would trust that all members of this Legislature see it as their responsibility to uphold the law of the land. Dalton

McGuinty may want to feel free to break his own promises, but surely, as members of the Legislature, we won't allow him to break the law of this province.

RUSSIAN-SPEAKING CONGRESS OF CANADA

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): I rise today to draw this House's attention to a significant event that I had the privilege to attend on behalf of Premier McGuinty in my riding on Sunday, May 16.

The Russian-speaking community of Canada gathered in my riding of Willowdale at the North York Civic Centre to celebrate a historic milestone: the creation and inauguration session of the Russian-speaking Congress of Canada. This congress represents some 350,000 Russian-speaking Canadians across Canada. This special occasion marks for the first time in its 100-year history the coming together of the Russian-speaking community to speak with a united voice.

It somehow seems fitting that this event took place in Canada and in Toronto. It reaffirms Toronto's position as the most multicultural city in this country. The Russian-speaking community is poised to do great things with the creation of this new umbrella organization. In the GTA alone, there is already an extensive cultural network of Russian not-for-profit organizations, media outlets, religious parishes and business leaders. This network includes five television programs, three radio programs, 10 weekly newspapers, four annual cultural events and more than 1,000 Russian businesses.

The Russian-speaking Congress of Canada can serve as a model for us all, demonstrating the strength and stature of a collective united voice.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I rise today to express my concern with the government's lack of support for rural Ontario. After the election, I was immediately uneasy when rural affairs disappeared from the radar screen only to reappear under the jurisdiction for the minister responsible for urban infrastructure. I have not been reassured since. In fact, since the budget I have become alarmed. This budget consistently diverts dollars from rural to urban Ontario and sets in place programs that benefit large cities over small towns and villages. One might be inclined to think this government doesn't know rural Ontario exists, or doesn't want to.

The government has not protected rural residents from unfair hydro rate increases, as promised. It has broken its promise of transition funding for tobacco farmers. It has allocated $83 per farm for nutrient management funding this year—hardly worthwhile. The two cents in gas tax that will be diverted to municipalities is dedicated to transit and means that the majority of the money will flow to urban centres. Maybe someone should tell the government that rural areas generally don't have transit systems.

To completely ignore the people who feed this province would have been too obvious, so the budget speech reannounced a few small measures the government has already taken in agriculture since the election. However, the Minister of Finance failed to mention the $128 million that has been cut from the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

Recently this government received a report that suggested that rural Ontario was unsustainable and that program dollars should be funnelled from rural Ontario to urban centres in the province. I'm afraid the budget presented yesterday shows the government wants to accept that premise and is headed in that direction.

I urge the Premier to break with tradition and keep the promise. I urge him to listen to the Minister of Agriculture, if indeed he is advocating on behalf of rural Ontario, and if he has lost faith in his colleague, to replace the present minister with one he respects.

CHILDREN'S IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Ontario health care providers are finally receiving the tools they need to lead the fight against chickenpox, bacterial meningitis and pneumonia. These diseases have threatened the health of our Ontario infants and children for far too long. Immunizations save lives, prevent serious illnesses and are recognized as one of the most effective public health interventions.

This government is taking the steps required to protect our children against preventable diseases for which vaccines are readily available, something the previous government put on the back burner for years. In the past 10 years, Ontario has held one of the worst records for immunization in Canada.

With this announcement, we have become only the second province to offer all necessary vaccinations for children. Adding these vaccines to the children's immunization program will save Ontario parents up to $600 per child in a child's first year. The reaction to the announcement of these additions has been overwhelming. The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada has praised this government's action, proclaiming that the new vaccines "give parents and caregivers the peace of mind that their children have been protected to the fullest extent of our health care ability."

The new vaccines will be added to the children's immunization program in the coming months and demonstrate this government's commitment to the health of Ontario's youngest citizens.

Yesterday I visited an immunization program in the Cambridge area with the Minister of Health and the response was overwhelming.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I am saddened that I have to raise an issue like this in the Legislature today, but I want to relate the experience of a

young aboriginal woman from a remote First Nation in northwestern Ontario.

Her name is Corrine Jeremiah. She had to travel out of her community to Thunder Bay Regional Hospital earlier this year to give birth. Sadly, just before her due date on March 30 she miscarried. In accordance with aboriginal tradition, she asked if the miscarried fetus could be returned to her community for the proper services. She went home to her community. Five weeks later the fetus came to the community in a cardboard box by parcel post, and it was labelled "diagnostic specimen." Of course, the miscarried fetus was decomposing badly. She is now undergoing counselling.

Imagine if someone came from Collingwood to Toronto to give birth and then miscarried and had to return home, and the fetus was mailed to them by parcel post, decomposed. This is a symbol of what happens when federal and provincial governments play ping pong with aboriginal health care.

I ask the Minister of Health to look into this situation, to look at having a review so that it never happens again.

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PRIMARY CARE

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My constituents are very pleased with the announcement of 150 family health teams that will work to improve primary care for 2.5 million Ontarians. The Liberal plan for change calls for improvements to direct primary care, providing front-line care that will bring family health teams to parts of the health system that have been neglected by the previous government. Family health teams will work to reduce wait times in hospitals and reduce doctor shortages in areas that are currently underserviced. This is especially crucial in my rural riding, where constituents have been feeling the pressure of not having access to a family doctor.

Family health teams consist of doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners, working alongside other health care professionals to provide much-needed front-line care, as well as providing consistent referrals to other community services like home care and nutrition counselling. Linda Haslam-Stroud, president of the Ontario Nurses' Association, responded, proclaiming, "Today's budget announcements about health care are an indication that the Liberal government clearly understands the challenges front-line nurses are facing in Ontario."

The former government's slash-and-spend approach to health care funding has resulted in a family doctor shortage that is unacceptable to my constituents. The creation of family health teams is representative of a new way to provide front-line health care. The Liberal plan for change will result in improved front-line care to millions of Ontarians.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): In rural ridings such as Leeds-Grenville, a man's word is his bond. I come from an area where major deals are often sealed with a handshake, so you can imagine my disgust with the McGuinty Liberals' first budget. Mr McGuinty's spin doctors and his media sycophants at the Globe and Star have tried to portray the man as a saint. Some saint. Saints don't break solemn vows or the laws of the province.

During the election, McGuinty guaranteed voters he would not raise taxes, despite making a glut of expensive promises. He even signed an agreement with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, promising a balanced budget with no tax increases, in compliance with the Taxpayer Protection Act. He stood before television cameras, he addressed groups, from prominent business leaders to schoolchildren, each time repeating the promise that his government would not increase taxes. He even offered proof, claiming an accounting firm had reviewed his promises and had verified that no tax increases would be required.

I'm sure that millions of Ontarians join me in questioning the moral fibre of a man who, it appears, would promise anything to get elected, while at the same time knowing in his own mind that he had no intention of following through with those promises.

I have to ask myself: What kind of man would do this? What example does this set for young people in Ontario? What answer can a parent give to a child who asks, "When is it OK to break the law? When is it OK to mislead?" One thing is for sure: Anyone shaking hands with Premier McGuinty would be well advised to count their fingers afterwards.

MEMBER'S CONDUCT

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): On Tuesday, budget day, the government laid out a beautiful four-year plan. There will be shorter waiting times for cardiac and cancer care. There will be expanded home care with 150 new family health teams. There will be free immunization for children and 8,000 new full-time—full-time—nursing positions. In my riding, we're going to get brownfields taken care of. I want to tell you that people are very proud. Municipalities see the new deal.

The opposition has no plan. They're just taking whacks. They don't even have manners.

I want to bring to the House's attention an editorial today in the Ottawa Citizen, entitled "Baird's Boorish Behaviour."

According to the Citizen, the member "did the cause of civil political discourse in Ontario no favours with his behaviour in the legislature Tuesday....

"Screaming insults as he was escorted out of the chamber made Mr Baird appear out of control and foolish."

Reminding its readers of the infamous Magna budget—we all know that one—the Citizens said that the member's "unparliamentary language and his ejection from the Legislature are just the latest acts of contempt the Conservatives have shown for the assembly....

"But dumb stunts like this diminish credibility.... We expect better."

I agree with the Citizen. The people want responsible debate about our budget.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to continue my statement from yesterday about that Jim Carrey movie that sounds like "Fire Fire." Dalton McGuinty can certainly star in the sequel. But it's not just me saying that. I want to read comments from average people across Ontario that are popping up on the Internet.

In the Toronto Star:

"Voices: Budget Fallout"

"It is one thing to tax tobacco, alcohol and luxuries. But to tax extra for health care after promising not to do such a thing, is so dishonest that no words can describe it. If Mr McGuinty has any integrity he would resign immediately." A person from Whitby, Ontario.

"Wildly regressive health care taxes. How 'liberal' is that?" A constituent from Ottawa.

"I am ashamed to say I voted for the Liberal Party in the last election. I thought it would be an improvement." A gentleman from Brantford.

The last one, from Toronto: "It is robbery. Rather than face the necessary challenge of stopping waste and duplication in the health care system, the Liberals chose the easy way—steal the money from taxpayers and throw it away."

I have two things to say to my colleagues on the government backbenches. The second thing is, remember that when you go to your ridings over the upcoming Victoria Day holiday week, you'll definitely hear this from a large number of your constituents. And when you're asked to dutifully read your scripts prepared by the backroom spin doctors, choreographers and puppet masters like Sheila James and Matt Maychak, remember that the geniuses in the Premier's office, safely ensconced in their offices, are figuring out which of the 16 seats they can afford to lose and still keep their jobs after the next election.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): There's a pleasant part to this, but this is not it: Let me take a moment to indicate that today is the last day for this group of pages. I know all members will want to join me in showing our appreciation for their hard work and assistance.

Here's the good news: I also know that members would want to congratulate this group for beating the previous speed record in delivering the budget documents on Tuesday.

Thank you for a job well done. I know you're going to continue to do the honours by having a wonderful oral question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Before I place the question, I'd like to thank the literally tens of thousands of Ontarians who are calling, writing, faxing all of us on the opposition side of the House to voice their disgust over this Liberal tax grab.

Minister, I've got your provincial budget in my hand, and on page 23 of your speech you have included revenues of $78.4 billion to the province of Ontario. But there's an asterisk beside it which says "revenue ... $3.9 billion." Can you tell us how much of the $3.9 billion you're booking as revenue this year will actually flow into the province's bank account this year?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I tell my friend from Nepean-Carleton that the $3.9 billion that is included in revenue this year is a result of policy changes that we made relating particularly to non-utility generators that had entered into power purchase contracts with the old Ontario Hydro. The accounting treatment of that policy change results in accountants telling us that we are to bring the recovery of those liabilities into our revenues this year if the policy is implemented this year. This gives us a revenue gain of $3.9 billion in this fiscal year.

Mr Baird: I asked how many dollars would flow into the province's bank account that you claim, and you didn't give me a clear answer. I'll tell you what we've discovered, Minister. Very little of that $3.9 billion will make it into the province's bank accounts this year. In fact, it could take our grandchildren until the year 2048 before all of that $3.9 billion makes it into the bank account of the government, while at the same time you're booking it as revenue and spending it this year.

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This looks like an Enron-style accounting trick. I don't have to remind you that when Enron executives and financial officers broke the law and did this type of sham accounting, they went to jail. Minister, will you now not admit that this is a massive accounting fraud, and will you change the budget to ensure that it accurately reflects the finances of the province?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I say to my friend from Nepean-Carleton that his approach to this Legislature is an embarrassment to himself and his party. I want to say to my friend from Nepean-Carleton that he had enough time in cabinet, as Minister of Energy, to understand that it was more than two years ago that this province moved from a cash accounting system of accounting for its revenues to an accrual system of revenues. The system that was brought in two years ago is the right system, brought in by his administration when he was Minister of Energy. He knows, notwithstanding the two-bit performance he's been giving in this House, that what we are doing is exactly what we are required to do by the accounting procedures dictated by the public service accounting board of this country.

Mr Baird: I say to the member opposite, I don't need any lectures from him on ethics and integrity in government after his performance this week. I'll tell you where this $3.9 billion comes from: It comes from the dirty electricity deals that he and his Liberal cabinet signed the last time they were in power. They signed sweetheart deals for as much as eight cents a kilowatt hour, and now, in an accounting sleight of hand, they are moving it from a debt and a liability on one set of books over to consumers on the other. The fact remains that you will collect virtually none of this $3.9 billion, but through an accounting sleight of hand you will pocket that money and spend it. People at Enron went to jail for this type of activity. How is what you are doing any different?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I pity the member from Nepean-Carleton. I pity him because it was less than two years ago that he sat in this Legislature as Minister of Energy. They had no plans at all for energy. The sector was in crisis. Either this former Minister of Energy knows the real story of non-utility generating contracts and knows that the revenues resulting from the change of policy require us to do what we are doing, or he spent so little time looking after his responsibilities as Minister of Energy that he is an embarrassment to that government, to his party and to this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Finance. I'd like you to think back to the oath of office you took when you took your seat here in the Legislature. I would like you to think about the context of that oath of office, which indeed, as a member of the Legislature, speaks to your upholding the laws and statutes of this place. Do you believe that you, as a member of the Legislature, should be upholding the law of this province?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Yes, I do.

Mr Klees: That being the case, I would like to remind the honourable member of legislation that is in force in this province today. It's section 2 of the Taxpayer Protection Act, which requires a referendum to be held to authorize any legislation that would be introduced for first reading in this House that would increase taxes.

If in fact the member believes it's his responsibility to uphold the law of this province, why is he breaking the law by introducing a budget into this place that breaks the law because it has not had the mandate of a referendum?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend from Oak Ridges is apparently, I think, spending too much time with his colleague my friend from Nepean-Carleton, given the tenor of that question. He suggests, with the rhetoric of his first question and in his supplementary, that somehow we are breaking the law. But I tell my friend that the fair and appropriate thing to do is simply to acknowledge to the people of Ontario that when we introduced the budget, we introduced the very same amendment that Minister Ecker, in her government, introduced to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act in order to bring forward amendments that otherwise would have required a referendum.

I want to tell you that the revenues we will raise with the health premium will put in place reforms to the health care system that your government ought to have proceeded with over the course of eight years, but did nothing on.

Mr Klees: The honourable member misses the point. I remind him of a quote from his leader, now the Premier, on October 4, 2003. It was in the context of the third party wanting to have standing as an official party, all in the interest of democratic reform. The Premier at that point in time said, "The rules are the rules—there will be no change. There was a rule in place. In fact, the rule has been changed once already. We'll respect the rule."

Why will you not respect the rule that is in place in this province today that requires you to have a referendum before you bring in a multi-billion dollar tax increase to the people of this province? Why will you not do that? What are you afraid of? Why will you not follow the law? Why do you insist on breaking the law with this budget?

Hon Mr Sorbara: What the member from Oak Ridges wants is a referendum on whether or not we should have 36,000 additional cardiac procedures in this province, a referendum on whether or not we should have 2,300 additional joint replacements, a referendum on whether we ought to have nine new MRI and CT sites, a referendum on whether or not we ought to have 9,000 new cataract procedures, a referendum on whether or not we ought to reform and improve children's mental health in this province, a referendum on whether or not we ought to give social assistance recipients an additional 3% on the money they use to feed themselves. The fact is, I categorically reject that referendum.

Mr Klees: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want the House to know that we have a petition that will be circulated to call for that referendum.

The Speaker: That is not a point of order.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Across this province, people are furious at your regressive and unfair tax grab that you try to call a health premium. They're furious that under your tax scheme, an individual making $26,000 a year will have to pay 1.2% of their taxable income, while someone who has an income of $150,000 a year will only pay 0.5% of their income. They're furious that someone with an income of $45,000 will have to pay 1% of their income, while someone with an income of half a million dollars will only pay 0.2% of their income.

In the election, you foolishly promised that you weren't going to raise taxes. Now you turn around and you go after middle- and modest-income working families. After making a broken promise the centre of your budget, why should people believe anything Liberals promise?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I tell my friend from Kenora-Rainy River that the centre of our budget was a health care plan that will dramatically transform the delivery of health care in this province and, at the same time, bring into line the ever-increasing costs of health care. It will result in 8,000 new nurses being hired. It will result in a far higher quality of long-term care in facilities that look after our seniors. It will transform health care. It will give service with community health teams to 167,000 people this year who would otherwise be without a family doctor. It will increase the number of doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners practising in this province. It will shorten waiting lists for cardiac care, joint replacement and heart surgery.

That's what we have in a health care plan. What my friend for Kenora-Rainy River and the New Democratic Party lack is any plan at all for health care in this province.

1400

Mr Hampton: You can try that, but those promises are about as empty as the promise to stop development on the Oak Ridges moraine, about as empty as the promise to freeze hydro rates and about as empty as the promise to reduce auto insurance premiums by 20%.

Here's the reality: You have gone after modest- and middle-income families and you're literally going to take, as a result of this budget, $3 billion out of their pockets. Meanwhile, the wealthiest people in Ontario, who got a 35% tax reduction from the Conservatives, you let go. Meanwhile, you're not going after corporations that got huge exemptions under the employer health tax. You had an option to go after the employer health tax and restore that tax loophole. You had an option to say to the people who got the massive tax cuts, "It's now your turn to contribute." Why should working families believe anything Liberals say from now on?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I recall that when, in the fall in this Legislature, we brought in Bill 2 that significantly raised corporate taxes in this province, as we said we would do during the election campaign, my friend from Kenora-Rainy River stood in his place and voted against that bill. He is against our reforms in health care. He is apparently against the notion of reducing waiting times for critical procedures. He is against a program that will give free vaccinations to children for chickenpox, pneumonia and meningitis. He is against reforming primary care so that services can be delivered more effectively in our communities.

My problem with my friend the leader of the New Democratic Party is that I know what he's against; I cannot figure out what he's for.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Hampton: To the Minister of Finance: The Minister of Finance stands here and wants people across Ontario to believe he didn't have a choice. You, sir, had a choice. You could have gone to individuals who have incomes of over $100,000 a year and who got the 35% tax reduction, and you could have said to them, "It's now time for you to make a greater contribution to health care." You could have gone to the largest corporations in Ontario, which got a $700-million tax reduction through the employer health tax loophole, and you could have said to them, "It's time for you to pay up."

What did you do? You went after modest- and middle-income families and you're literally taking the whole $3 billion from them. Why should those people believe anything you have to say about health care? Why should they believe anything Liberals promise from now on?

Hon Mr Sorbara: This province is the only province in Canada that will have a health premium that is geared to income. The very lowest premium paid by an individual will be $60 per year and the highest premium will be $900 per year. It's the only province in Canada that has a health premium that is geared to income. Now, back in the fall when my friend was in this Legislature and we brought forward a bill to significantly increase corporate taxes, as we said we were going to do, to roll back the tax decreases, the tax cuts that the Conservatives inappropriately gave to corporate Ontario, my friend from Kenora-Rainy River stood in his place and voted against that bill. His record doesn't stand up when it comes to taxes in this province.

Mr Hampton: The Minister of Finance says his middle-income tax grab is progressive. Here is the situation: Husband has an income of $49,000, wife has an income of $49,000, and the Ontario Liberals now say to that family, "You owe $1,200 under the health tax." Frank Stronach has an income of $52 million, and do you know what Ontario Liberals say? Mr Stronach only has to contribute $900. That's your definition of progressive?

You are trying to deny that you had a choice. You want to talk about the phantom tax cuts of the Conservatives, that wouldn't have happened until 2005 or 2006. This is about your budget, your budget of this week, where you went after working families for $3 billion. You didn't touch the corporations and the wealthiest of Ontario at all. Why should working families believe anything Liberals promise?

Hon Mr Sorbara: The answer to that question is plain and simple. My friend from Kenora-Rainy River has rhetoric beyond belief. In contrast to that, we have a plan. We have a plan that will put 8,000 new nurses in long-term-care facilities and community care facilities around Ontario. We have a plan that will see some 95,700 more Ontarians receive home care where they should be getting home care. We have a plan that will see some 2,300 more joint replacements done in this province for people whose hips no longer work. We have a plan for an additional 12,000 bed lifts so that nurses who are working in our hospitals and long-term-care facilities will not injure themselves on the job. That is what the people asked us to do during our consultation and that is the plan that will improve health care in the province of Ontario.

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Acting Premier: We all know that you had no intention of keeping your campaign promise not to raise taxes. You raised taxes, but you say you were not aware of the $5.6-billion fiscal risk. But, even after Erik Peters released his report on October 29, 2003, the Premier continued to tell people he would not raise taxes.

On November 1, on Focus Ontario, the Premier said, " ... we will not be raising taxes. Families are carrying enough of burden as it is."

November 20, throne speech day: "We're not going to raise taxes. That's just not on the table."

December 18, in a media scrum: "I don't want to raise taxes. It is not my intention," said Premier McGuinty.

When asked point blank on January 14, even into this new year, if he would raise taxes, Dalton McGuinty said "No."

Why did the Premier continue to break his promises? What kind of man is this Premier when he knew full well he had no intention of keeping his promise?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Our commitment to transform health care in Ontario is what is at the centre of this budget. Our commitment to give ourselves a system of public education in Ontario that is second to none is at the core of our budget; our commitment to transform the quality of life in our communities; to start rebuilding infrastructure again; to start building public transit again; to fix the mess we were left with in Ontario Hydro and the energy system; to start to do something real for the most vulnerable in this province; to start again to bring northern Ontario into the economic growth of this province; to start, finally, to do something for people who live in rural Ontario: That is what is at the heart of our budget, and our measures gave us the capacity to pay for that, and I'm very proud of it.

Mr Hudak: As I said yesterday, nobody believes a word you say anymore. Dalton McGuinty as Premier promised one thing before the campaign and had no intention of keeping his promise. Even as Premier, he continued to say he would not raise taxes when he knew full well he was going to be raising taxes on middle-class families.

And I think you, sir, by sitting next to that man, have caught the disease of chronic promise breaking. Even within a week, or days, of your budget, you continued to say you would not be raising taxes on personal income. You know full well that in your own budget documents your new health tax is being collected through the income tax system. It is a tax on income.

Why did you continue, even up to the last days of the budget, to promise something you knew you wouldn't keep? Why should we trust a word that Dalton McGuinty says anymore?

1410

Hon Mr Sorbara: I appreciate my friend—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Do you think he has finished asking the question yet?

Interjection.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I appreciate my friend from Erie-Lincoln's drama in this Legislature.

Mr Hudak: No, because we're angry. You don't understand that people are angry.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Would you allow the Minister of Finance to respond?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I understand where my friend is coming from. The anger of the people of Ontario is rooted in the eight and a half years of Conservative government, allowing the revenue base—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Sorbara: They can't get over it. We inherited a set of problems. We're in the process—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I don't think anyone is interested in the answer.

NURSING EDUCATION

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. A few moments ago, the Minister of Finance restated the budget commitment to increase the number of full-time nursing positions by 8,000. If we are to achieve this goal, Ontario needs to train more nurses. What is your ministry doing to expand undergraduate nursing education?

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the member for Mississauga West. My Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities works alongside the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on the health human resources development strategy. This week's budget included $45.9 million for nursing education. That's $9.5 million more than the previous government spent on nursing education. That will represent funding for 4,000 new first-year, full-time collaborative nursing students, and that will start in 2004-05.

Mr Delaney: Thank you, Minister. It's a ray of hope for health care workers, who will welcome this news.

There's also work to be done in the area of graduate nursing education. Students in these programs go on to teach future nurses of Ontario. Minister, please tell me what this budget means for graduate nursing education in Ontario?

Hon Mrs Chambers: The budget actually unveiled a new fund, a nursing faculty fund of $10 million for training master's and PhD nursing professionals. This will increase the level of nursing skill in this province and increase the enrolment in these graduate programs by 30% by 2007-08.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): To the Minister of Finance: The minister will know that working

families around Ontario are angry. They feel they have been misled. They feel they have been taken advantage of. They feel that they're carrying the burden of this Liberal government's breaking its promise not to raise taxes, and we are their voice in this place.

Minister, on May 12, the Toronto Sun quotes you as saying, "I think on other occasions I have said we are not going to adjust the rate of taxation on personal income in this province."

How can you make a statement like that and just a week later so completely break that promise? What has changed since May 12 when you made that outrageous statement?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): The budget included an Ontario health premium. It is not linked to the rates of personal income tax. It's a unique hybrid premium that is income-geared and is going to help pay for the plan we have to improve health care in this province. It will give us improvements in home care. It will give us improvements in long-term care. It will help us. This year, as I said earlier, 170,000 individuals under this plan will receive care who otherwise could not find a family doctor.

I want to tell you that I am very proud of that plan. Just in terms of commentary and what people are saying, I will quote, if I could, from the Globe and Mail editorial of May 19 in which the editorialist said, "The former Conservative government put the Liberals in an economic box with its dismal record of financial management and its unconscionable pretense that the books were nearly balanced."

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Heads up the Globe and Mail.

I want to say, with respect, that there's a sort of impression among the public that this is a seat-of-the-pants government with respect to some of these initiatives.

I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, in his so-called commitment to improving health care in the province, with the fact that he's delisting services in this budget and the impact that's going to have on so many people, especially those who depend on physiotherapy and chiropractic services, and with the impact that may have in terms of the health of Ontarians and ultimately may have in increasing the health care budget for taxpayers across this province, what kind of empirical studies, what kind of studies did you undertake to assess the impact before you made the decision of, in effect, giving Ontarians less for more in terms of health care?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I say to my friend from Leeds-Grenville that it is never easy, it is never welcome to have to delist services. These are services that play an important role in the overall delivery of health care in Ontario. Make no mistake about that. In terms of physiotherapy, we've made it clear that it will continue to be delivered to seniors through long-term-care and home care facilities and to individuals who receive Ontario disability support programs. In terms of optometry, we are going to continue to provide services for people under the age of 20 and seniors over the age of 64.

But in making choices—and government is about making difficult choices—our choice is to move resources to where they are critically needed, including reducing waiting times for joint replacements and cardiac surgery.

HEALTH CARE

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): My question is for the Minister of Finance. I think we all know that the people of Ontario have been demanding better health care for years. People are always talking to me about wait times for cancer care being too long, about seniors who want to age in place in their homes and don't have the support they need, about children who need immunization and can't get it because of the cost. Minister, can you talk to us about what specific results the health premium will deliver this year?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I want to thank my friend for the question. We are beginning on a journey of significant transformation of our health care system. I am particularly proud of what we are going to be able to start to do with children's mental health. But in the larger areas, I think of the 3,760 additional long-term beds that will be available under the health plan. I think of the 9,000 more cardiac surgeries that are going to be done. I'm thinking of the $60 million that will be available for bed lifts in hospitals. I'm thinking about the $5 million to establish a cancer care innovation fund that will promote new approaches so that we can reduce waiting times for people suffering from that terrible disease.

I could go on, but perhaps I'll leave some time for a supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Good idea. Supplementary.

Ms Wynne: Thank you for those specific plans. I'm pleased that this is a four-year plan that's been laid out. I've been getting calls from people who are happy to see we're committed to better health care, but a number of constituents who called didn't know that the proposed health premiums will be on taxable income. People had the impression it was on gross income, not on income after deductions. Can you confirm that the premium will be on taxable income?

1420

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend raises a very important question, because for many people the deductions on income resulting in taxable income will very much lower the threshold upon which the health premium is determined. For example, things like costs of child care, union and professional fees, attendant care and RRSP contributions will be deducted from income before reaching taxable income and the amount upon which the premium is calculated.

I think, though, the most important thing about this premium is that it's the first health care premium in Canada which is geared to income. Much more important

than that, it will provide the revenues necessary to provide the services that the constituents of my friend from Don Valley West need most, and that's the thing that I'm happy about.

The Speaker: New question.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question to the Minister of Finance. Your decision to privatize health care services will have a very serious impact on patients. Today I spoke with Dr Andrew Chung, an optometrist who delivers eye care to new immigrants and low-income people in my riding of Toronto-Danforth. Many of his patients are seamstresses who spend hours every day paying very close attention to detail in their stitching work. They make very poor wages, and because of their work they suffer significant eye strain. They are not capable of paying out of pocket for eye exams which they need.

Minister, when you chose to privatize eye care services, did you even think about the negative impact on women like these?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend from Toronto-Danforth has a marvellous way of shaping a question to create a somewhat distorted impression of reality. Her regrettable suggestion that we are privatizing health care is simply and thoroughly unacceptable. She knows it's not true; it ought not to be part of her preamble.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): What do you call it when you have to pay out of your own pocket for health service, you moron?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Could I ask the member for Kenora-Rainy River to withdraw that unparliamentary—

Mr Hampton: I withdraw, Speaker.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I say to my friend from Toronto, attempting as I do to ignore the outburst of the leader of that party, that what we have done is delisted a narrow band of services in a very broad band of services that continue to be covered. A routine eye examination for individuals between 20 and 64 will be delisted.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Sorbara: In response to that, sir, talking to that very same mother of two children, we provide instead free vaccines for some of the most serious diseases. Before we brought in these reforms, vaccines for chickenpox, meningitis and pneumonia, which could cost that family some $600 to $1,200 in a year, will now be covered by the government of Ontario.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I say to the Minister of Finance, when you pay out of your own pocket for health care, that's privatization. That's two-tier medicine. That's what you promised you weren't going to do when you went out and tried to buy the votes of electors in the last election. Now here you are cutting off health care services for people. Here you are privatizing health care services. Here you are forcing people to pay out of their own pocket for health care. They shouldn't have to, because they already pay for health care through the tax system and they're going to pay even more because of your regressive new health tax.

These are people who cannot afford to pay out of their pocket for private rehab, private physiotherapy, private eye exams etc. You promised during the election that you were not going to privatize health care services. Will you reverse your decision to force people to pay for eye care, physiotherapy and chiropractic care to ensure that they can get the health care they need?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Just generally, I would suggest to you that the theorizing behind the question from my friend from Nickel Belt is one of the reasons her party did very poorly during their five years in government.

I want to say to you that delisting any service is a difficult decision, but with the additional revenues we garner, we are able to improve public health care; provide more public health nurses for those very families; ensure there will be shorter waiting times for critical services.

Mr Hampton: More promises. Why should anybody believe any promise a Liberal makes?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Going back to the question from my friend from Kenora-Rainy River, let us remember that Tommy Douglas, the father of medicare in this country, was one of the first to introduce health care premiums in Saskatchewan, and late in his life he lamented the fact that his health care premiums were not geared to income. Ours are, and that's great progress.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Finance. During the election you promised that you would not reduce health services. With the delisting of key services, you have done exactly that: You have broken your promise. By delisting key services, you have not only reduced health care but you are now forcing working families in Ontario and in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke to pay for those services. It is an unprecedented attack on working Ontarians, on working Ontario families. Some of those who need chiropractic and physiotherapy services need them just to continue working. Will you admit that the Liberals, who call themselves the champions of public health care, are in fact the chief architects of private, two-tier health care in Ontario?

Hon Mr Sorbara: As we implement our plan in the province, Ontario will become a Canadian and North American leader in the delivery of high-quality public health care, because we have a plan. That plan includes our ability, over the course of three years, to increase by 36,000 the number of heart procedures we're going to be able to do. We're going to be able to increase by some 2,300 the number of joint replacements we'll be able to do. We are going to put in, this year, some nine new MRI and CT sites. We are going to have some 9,000 additional cataract surgeries. For my friend to suggest that somehow this represents a diminution of the quality of health care services is absolutely unacceptable.

They do not have a plan over there. They allowed the system to deteriorate while they were in government and,

now that they are in opposition, I believe they firmly regret what they did to health care in this province.

Mr Yakabuski: Minister, the people don't believe you. They have no reason to believe you. Public opposition to this decision is growing from a muffled roar to a deafening crescendo across this province. Will you admit that this decision to delist services was wrong and commit to reconsidering that decision now so that working families who need these services and cannot afford them will not be left without health care in Ontario?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Maybe my friend's problem is that he has not read up on the history of his party. Let's take a visit. They came to power: 20,000 nurses gone; water inspectors gone; meat inspectors gone; budget for education gone. That's their legacy. That's what we inherited. That's what we're repairing. That's what is at the centre of this budget, and that's why it will be hailed by the people of the province.

1430

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): My question is to the minister responsible for senior citizens. Seniors in my riding of Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake want to know if their services will be enhanced with the new budget. In particular, they want to know about any enhancements to home care. Home care is essential to the overall quality of care in Niagara and Ontario. Not only is it more cost-effective than treating people in hospitals; it allows people to stay longer in the comfort and dignity of their own home. How will this budget improve home care for seniors?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I'd like to thank the member for a very relevant question. Certainly the four-year plan outlined in the budget is the key to the transformation of our health care system, and bringing care home to the people who need it is a main ingredient of that. This year, as has already been stated here today, $88 million will be spent for additional home care services, mainly for senior citizens in their own homes. As a matter of fact, over the next four years, that figure will reach $448 million. It's the largest expansion of the home care system in this province.

The seniors of Ontario want to stay at home as long as possible. The home care money that we're providing in this budget will allow them to do that. Over the next four years, more than 95,000 additional individuals, mainly seniors, will be getting the home care that they are not currently getting.

Mr Craitor: For too long, palliative care has been ignored in Ontario. Does the home care strategy also include funds directed to palliative care?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: I'm very pleased to say that for the first time in Ontario, thanks to the new dollars from the federal health reform fund as well, new funding will be directed to palliative care. This is consistent with our view that people should be living out the final days of their lives with dignity and respect, either in hospital or in their own homes.

Funding for end-of-life care will rise to $125 million per year in four years and will serve over 6,000 people. We will start this year with a $10-million fund. That's in addition to the $191 million that has been given to the long-term-care facilities for additional personal care and nursing care support services.

These are all initiatives to assist the senior citizens of this province to live out the final days of their lives with dignity and respect, and we're very proud of that.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. I was intrigued by the question from the member for Niagara Falls. There are approximately 6,000 seniors living in his constituency. He just asked a question and found out from the minister that much of your entire reforms are going to be predicated on an expansion of home care for about 6,000 to 7,000 more seniors in this province.

I want to put in context the fact that what many seniors have told me over the last two days is that this is a government—and you, in particular, are a minister—that fails to understand exactly what the profile of seniors is in Ontario. There are 1.65 million seniors in this province. There are only 70,000 in long-term-care facilities. There are only 150,000 receiving home care.

Why have your tax grabs and items that you passed in November and in the May budget, which was tabled two days ago, been a direct attack on the 1.5 million remaining seniors in this province?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: What the member is suggesting couldn't be further from the truth. What we are suggesting is that over 6,000 individuals in this province will be receiving palliative care. We're also saying that over the next four years, an additional 95,700 individuals, mainly seniors, who are not currently getting home care services will be getting those services. They will be individuals who will be released from hospital, who either need post-acute-care help or who are suffering from chronic care situations in their own homes. What this member is suggesting as to what we're doing to seniors simply is not the truth. The truth is that over 95,000 individuals will be getting home care over the next four years who are not getting it right now.

Mr Jackson: It's very clear that what you're doing couldn't be further from the truth, by your own statements. It couldn't be further from the truth. We asked you about mandatory retirement, which you agree with. Now we know it's so you can tax seniors longer and further into their retirement years. We know the truth is that when your Premier told teachers in this province that they would get more for education, it was because he was prepared to take away from other programs.

The problem is, seniors in this province didn't think their health care would be your first target. You have targeted seniors to remove their physiotherapy services, their chiropractic services. These people have no protection.

One of the interesting calls I got was from a hydro retiree. He is convinced that his plan is going to cover all these expenses that you've downloaded on to seniors. We need some assurances that you're going to do something, that you at least, as the minister, recognize how vulnerable 1.5 million seniors are, not just from your hydro increases, your tax increases and the delisting of health services, but you're creating two-tier health services for retirees and for people who still have jobs in this province. What are you going to do about it?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: As the member well knows, physiotherapy services will still be available for seniors over 64 in exactly the same way as before. He knows that eye examinations will be available for them as well if they're over 64. He also knows that as part of the budget they will be given an additional $125 per year in a property tax credit. You may recall, Speaker, that they were the ones who gave the seniors the huge property tax credit when the seniors themselves said, "We don't want it. Put it into health care and education."

That's exactly what we're doing in this budget. The over $2.4 billion in premiums in our health care budget will be to a large extent going to seniors, because we know that the senior population needs the health care dollars more than any other group in our society. There are 95,000 seniors who are not getting home care right now and who need home care right now who will be getting that over the next four years with the $448 million of additional money for home care in our budget.

OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Sarnia's occupational health clinic for Ontario workers was established in 1999 to respond to needs of injured workers and occupational disease in my riding. The Sarnia OHCOW has proven to be a great benefit to injured workers in my riding, providing assistance to those affected. This clinic has become a tremendous resource in the complex field of occupational disease.

Since 1999, I, along with many community members, have been fighting to have permanent funding status for this clinic. Can you update the House on the details of the permanent status of the clinic?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): I am very pleased to take this question from the member for Sarnia-Lambton. On the 14th of this month, I was delighted to be in Sarnia to make an announcement that the member has been fighting for for years, that the mayor has been fighting for for years and that the provincial Liberals have been fighting for for years, and that is to make the Sarnia-Lambton OHCOW a permanent member of the OHCOW family.

The work that has been done in that clinic, in the area of occupational disease in particular, has been so valuable, so important. It is a success story. It is supported by all members of the community, business and labour, provincial and municipal. It is doing such important work. Not only will it receive permanent status but stable funding, so they can continue the good work for Sarnia-Lambton and the workers in the future.

1440

Ms Di Cocco: Minister, the announcement was welcome and long overdue. In the past, my community watched while previous labour ministers ignored the issue and would not commit to the permanent funding for this clinic.

Occupational disease is a terrible condition that's devastating families. What else are you doing to protect Ontario workers from occupational disease?

Hon Mr Bentley: Again, the member from Sarnia-Lambton has been leading the fight in this area and in many different areas, not only in the occupational disease area but also in the environmental area.

Let me inform the House what else we're doing. First of all, the WSIB is involved in a review of the structure and the framework for the resolution of occupational disease issues. I expect to receive information about that toward the end of the summer or in early fall, and will be able to build on that information.

Second, recently we announced a new way of improving the occupational exposure limit assessment process in the province of Ontario. The occupational exposure limits to potentially hazardous substances in workplaces that were reviewed entirely in 1986 and not again until 1999. What we announced was a regular review of the exposure limits to protect all workers with up-to-date medical and scientific information. But that's not all. We also announced the hiring of 25 inspectors, and we also announced—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. New question.

COURT BACKLOG

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Minister of Finance. Yesterday there was a shocking court decision in the Galassi case in Hamilton. The judge threw out a case of sexual assault, assault causing bodily harm, assault with a weapon and three other serious counts against a police officer. The victim of the alleged assault was the officer's former partner. The judge said he threw out the case because of what he called intolerable and unconstitutional delays in bringing the officer to trial. Lenore Lukasik-Foss, of the Sexual Assault Centre of Hamilton, says her group is "deeply distressed and outraged," and I'm sure we all are. Minister, will your government appeal this terrible decision?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I note the absence of the Attorney General, attending the funeral in Cobourg today, so perhaps what we'll do is take the member's question as notice.

I understand the extent of her work personally in these areas. I know that she follows them very carefully. I understand where she's coming from on the question. But I wouldn't want to comment on whether or not the crown

would appeal. I would leave that to the Attorney General for further comment. Although we're not here next week, it may well be that the Attorney General would get a copy of Hansard and respond directly to my friend from Toronto-Danforth.

Ms Churley: Thank you very much for that response, Minister. I will take it up with the Attorney General, because I'm sure we would all agree that it should be appealed.

I have another question for you. After reading your budget, I'm afraid we're going to have more cases like this thrown out of court, and that is unacceptable. You do have more money this year to clear court backlogs, but by the end of your term the justice budget will have dropped by 8% after inflation. That means that court programs will be slashed as a result. That will mean more delays in getting to court, which is why the judge said this case was thrown out, and more women who are assaulted seeing their assailants getting off scot-free. That could lead to more women being murdered, and that is unacceptable. So I'm asking, Minister, will you admit that your budget won't provide the money our justice system needs, and do something about it?

Hon Mr Sorbara: No, I wouldn't admit any such thing. I would say to her that we are making significant increases in community—

Ms Churley: But it's going to drop again.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I know that she wants to hear the answer.

We are making significant increases to services for women who are the victims of domestic violence. We are providing additional money for shelter for women who must escape their homes to avoid violence. I tell her as well that the Attorney General's ministry, over the course of the next four years and in accordance with our plans, will be making dramatic changes so that we can get better results with the resources we have. I want to tell my friend for Toronto-Danforth that we have to hold our expenses in this province to a rate that is less than the growth of our revenues. That's the only way we're going to balance the books, and we're going to do that. I want to tell my friend that I understand the problems in Hamilton, and I know we are going to resolve them.

AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: Yesterday we heard you stand in this House and defend your government's betrayal of Ontario's farmers by saying the removal of $128 million from the ministry's budget was due to programs that had run their course. You attributed a 20% reduction in the ministry budget to the end of healthy futures and the BSE funding. But I didn't see anything in the budget about replacing those programs. They seem to have just disappeared. A reduction of $128 million doesn't give you any room to put replacement programs in place. It does give your urban colleagues 128 million extra programming dollars, however. I guess the beef farmers are just out of luck.

Minister, will you stand up for rural Ontario today and demand the Premier return those programming dollars to you so Ontario farmers will not suffer further hardship at the hands of your government?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): The commitment of this government to rural Ontario is unprecedented, and I think that's demonstrated most clearly by the $900 million that has been allocated to rural Ontario for infrastructure. As well, we're committed to working with the agricultural community on the transition as we move to the new generation of safety nets in this province. There's $173 million in transition funding that is going to be there. Those are dollars that will be going to the agricultural community in the province.

As well, for the first time in years, there is an increase in capital spending in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. As I've had the opportunity to review the budget in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, what is so disturbing is that capital dollars the previous government had allocated, they didn't spend. They made a promise. A promise made, and a promise not kept. We're going to allocate new dollars to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food that are going to benefit the farmers in this province.

Mr Hardeman: Yesterday you suggested that I shouldn't question your removal of millions of dollars from the ministry's budget because of what happened when I was the minister. I will admit that we found more efficient ways of delivering some programs, but those dollars did not leave agriculture in Ontario. We simply took programs once administered by the ministry and turned them into arms-length agricultural agencies.

With your budget, $128 million has disappeared—no replacement programs, no increase in funding for promises kept. Minister, please tell me where those dollars went and why you were totally ignored at the cabinet table. Or did you not even fight for the farmers? Are you still fighting for the farmers, or have you just given up on their behalf?

Hon Mr Peters: I just have to laugh. I could tell you—

Mr Hardeman: It's not funny.

Hon Mr Peters: I have not given up, and this government has not given up. I think the commitment from the Premier on down has been demonstrated very clearly: This is a government that is committed to working with the agricultural community.

There's a commitment in this budget for $120 million a year to support the agricultural community through safety net programs. There are additional dollars going to the agricultural community through the other four pillars of the agricultural policy framework. That agricultural policy framework is going to bring almost $670 million into this province. Some of the programs: $45 million for the healthy futures program that has come to an end; $64 million in the bridge funding that has come to an end.

These dollars are no longer part of the budget. We are going to be working through the agricultural policy framework to make sure we deliver good programs and, more importantly, safety net programs—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. Petitions.

1450

PETITIONS

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): "To the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty promised to create 150 new family health teams in Ontario during the last provincial election; and

"Whereas Lanark-Carleton MPP Norm Sterling strongly endorses a local proposal for the creation of a new community health centre to serve Kanata, West Carleton and Goulbourn, as this area is one of the fastest-growing communities in all of Canada and the community health centre will mean improved access to quality health care for local families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government move quickly to fulfill its promise to create 150 family health teams and establish a new community health centre to serve Kanata, West Carleton, Goulbourn and the surrounding area, and that the Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre (formerly known as the Community Resource Centre of Goulbourn, Kanata and West Carleton) proposal which is currently before the Ministry of Health be approved."

I sign this, as I agree with it.

NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I have a petition to the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, honourable ministers and members of Parliament.

"We, the undersigned, are eager to see our health care system strengthened and the health care of choice made available to all who live in Ontario

"We implore the Legislative Assembly for the province of Ontario, its ministers and its members, to use their offices to immediately amend the Regulated Health Professions Act in order to permit registered nurses to take orders from naturopathic doctors in order to act effectively as a medical team and provide the care and treatments these health professionals and their patients feel appropriate and necessary."

AJAX-PICKERING HOSPITAL

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly. I will be presenting the first thousand of those this afternoon, with more to follow. This is signed by Jill Mason, past chair of the board of the Ajax-Pickering General Hospital. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas at the time the Centenary Health Centre and Ajax-Pickering hospitals amalgamated under the umbrella of the Rouge Valley Health System, a commitment was made by the Health Services Restructuring Commission that the communities of Whitby/Pickering/Ajax, according to the amalgamation agreement, would not lose a full-service hospital and would maintain all existing services; and

"Whereas municipal governments in the region of Durham have provided financial support to the Rouge Valley Health System on the understanding that Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service hospital; and

"Whereas numerous service clubs and other organizations have also raised money in support of the expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital and services provided therein such as the maternity unit on the understanding that the Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service facility; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health System has changed its strategic plan without consulting its key stakeholders, such as the residents who use the hospital, the doctors, nurses and other professional staff that work within the system and the local governments and organizations that fund the hospital; and

"Whereas this has led to a decrease in the level of service provided by the maternity unit and the number of acute care beds;

"We, the undersigned concerned citizens of west Durham, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That a full-service hospital with all the existing services at the time of amalgamation be maintained at the Ajax-Pickering site and new services added as the population continues to grow and age, as agreed to by the Ajax-Pickering General Hospital and Centenary Health Centre in the amalgamation agreement signed May 31, 1998."

CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas over 1.2 million people use chiropractic services every year in the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas those who use chiropractic services consider this an important part of their health care and rely on these services along with the OHIP funding in order to function; and

"Whereas the elimination or reduction of chiropractic services would be viewed as breaking the promise not to reduce universal access to health care; and

"Whereas by eliminating or reducing OHIP coverage of chiropractic services, where the patient pays part of the cost, will end up costing the government far more in

additional physician, emergency department and hospital visits:

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Parliament of Ontario does not delist chiropractic services from the Ontario health insurance plan, and that assurance is given that funding for chiropractic services not be reduced or eliminated."

It is signed by many people from my riding.

PRIMARY CARE

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Peterborough is suffering a crisis in terms of accessibility to health care, brought on by the severe and growing shortage of family physicians; and

"Whereas the community of Peterborough has demonstrated extraordinarily strong local leadership in developing a proposal for primary care reform which is very innovative and will provide access to primary care for the growing list of more than 20,000 residents in our community without a family physician; and

"Whereas this proposal has been endorsed by the county of Peterborough, the city of Peterborough, the Peterborough County Medical Society, the Peterborough Community Care Access Centre, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre and the Peterborough County-City Health Unit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work with representatives of the local community to ensure that all residents of Peterborough have access to an appropriate primary care provider through the timely implementation of the proposed integrated primary care model, as this model provides appropriate and equitable compensation for family physicians while incorporating sufficient interdisciplinary health care providers, community linkages and appropriate administrative infrastructure and information technology supports to enable health care professionals to enjoy a more realistic, healthy work-life balance."

I'll affix my signature to it.

CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas over 1.2 million people use chiropractic services every year in the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas those who use chiropractic services consider this an important part of their health care and rely on these services along with the OHIP funding in order to function; and

"Whereas the elimination or reduction of chiropractic services would be viewed as breaking the promise not to reduce universal access to health care; and

"Whereas by eliminating or reducing OHIP coverage of chiropractic services, where the patient pays part of the cost, will end up costing the government far more in additional physician, emergency department and hospital visits;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Parliament of Ontario does not delist chiropractic services from the Ontario health insurance plan, and that assurance is given that funding for chiropractic services not be reduced or eliminated."

I support this petition, and I affix my name to it.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry or re-entry of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

PHYSICIAN SHORTAGE

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Our community is facing an immediate, critical situation in accessing physician services.

"While the recruitment and retention of physicians has been a concern for many years, it is now reaching crisis proportions.

"Training more physicians in Ontario is certainly the best response to this problem in the longer term. We are, however, in urgent need of support for immediate short-term solutions that will allow our community both to retain our current physicians and recruit new family

doctors and specialists in seriously understaffed areas. Foreign-trained physicians may help us to respond to this need.

"Therefore we, as the residents of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, urge you to respond to our community's and our region's critical and immediate needs. For us, this is truly a matter of life and death."

It's signed by many people from my riding.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas seniors and other qualified patients require the continued provision of physiotherapy services through schedule 5 clinics to promote recovery from medical conditions and continued mobility and good health;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The patients of schedule 5 physiotherapy clinics request the continued support of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for provision of OHIP-covered physiotherapy treatment to qualified seniors and others in need of these vital health care procedures."

1500

SMALL BUSINESS TAX RELIEF

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): "Stay the Course on Small Business Tax Relief.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas business tax cuts have helped fuel the strongest economic and job growth ever seen in Canada; and

"Whereas corporate income taxes on the smaller businesses that create most of our new jobs have been scheduled to be reduced to 5% in 2004 and 4% in 2005; and

"Whereas the corporate income tax rate for manufacturing and processing firms has been scheduled to be cut to 10% for 2004, 9% in 2005 and 8% in 2006; and

"Whereas the general corporate income tax rate has been scheduled to be 11% for 2004, 9.5% for 2005 and 8% for 2006; and

"Whereas the capital tax on employers is on the road to be cut by 10% in 2004, with the plan to scrap it entirely;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario stay the course and maintain the scheduled tax reductions for job-creating businesses."

GO TRANSIT

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from a group of commuters in the Lisgar and Meadowvale area of Mississauga.

"Whereas the city of Mississauga has, within a generation, grown from a linked collection of suburban and farming communities into Canada's sixth-largest city, and tens of thousands of people daily need to commute into and out of Mississauga in order to do business, educate themselves and their families and enjoy culture and recreation; and

"Whereas gridlock on all roads leading into and out of Mississauga makes peak period road commuting impractical, and commuter rail service on the Milton GO line is restricted to morning and afternoon service into and out of Toronto; and

"Whereas residents of western Mississauga need to commute to commute, driving along traffic-clogged roads to get to overflowing parking lots at the Meadowvale, Streetsville and Erindale GO train stations;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, instruct GO Transit to allocate sufficient resources from its 2004-05 capital budget to proceed immediately with the acquisition of land and construction of a new GO train station, called Lisgar, at Tenth Line and the rail tracks, to alleviate the parking congestion, and provide better access to GO train service on the Milton line for residents of western Mississauga."

As one of those residents, I am pleased to affix my signature and to have Conor carry it up for me.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp (MPAC) and are subject to property taxes; and

"Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourism economy without requiring significant municipal services; and

"Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003; that the tax not be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers and trailer parks, municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders."

I'll affix my signature to this.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I would like to draw your attention to the Speaker's gallery. We have with us today Her Excellency Theresa Solomon, High Commissioner for the Republic of South Africa to Canada. Please join me in warmly welcoming her here today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2004 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 19, 2004, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The leader of the third party.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I must say I look forward to having to say a few words about this budget. I said, when it was introduced, that I believe it is the most regressive budget ever introduced in the history of Ontario, and I want to talk about that just for a few minutes, because over the past few days I've had the opportunity to do an even more detailed examination of this budget.

I'll go into the issue of broken promises later, because I think many people across Ontario are very concerned, and rightfully so, about a Premier who would look into the television camera and say, "I won't raise your taxes," and then turn around and hit ordinary middle- and modest-income working Ontarians with a $3-billion tax grab. Many people are quite naturally concerned about that, and they should be concerned about that.

But I want to really go through the details of the budget, because what is so regressive about this is that, first of all, if you go through this budget, there is not one tax increase on the corporate sector in Ontario. I read that Bay Street was very happy about this budget. I know why Bay Street is so happy. I know why the coupon clippers and the folks at Nortel who screw around with the books are happy with this budget. I know why the Frank Stronachs and their $52-million-a-year incomes are happy with this budget. It's because not one cent of the $3-billion tax increase is going to come from the Frank Stronachs or the Nortels or the banks or the Enrons—not one cent.

After saying they were not going to increase taxes on working families, the Liberals have brought forward a budget which takes $3 billion out of the pockets of working families and lets the Bay Street corporations and the $52-million-a-year Frank Stronachs whistle all the way to the bank. That's the definition of regressive, when you go after hard-working people, people in many cases who are trying to work at two or three jobs to pay the rent and put food on the table, and say to them, "We want another 2% of your income," and yet you say to the Frank Stronachs, "Hey, man, we're on your side. We don't want you to pay any taxes. We don't want Magna to pay any additional taxes. Nortel, we know you've been screwing around with the books, but we don't want you to pay any additional taxes." That is what is so unfair about this. It is so regressive. It is so unbalanced. It goes after the wrong people, and it goes after them in spades.

The Premier and the Minister of Finance stand up here and say, "Well, we had no choice." I think people across Ontario recognize that when the Conservatives were the government, individuals who had an income of $100,000 or more got a 35% tax reduction. With a $52-million-a-year income, Frank Stronach's taxes were cut by 25%. Do you know what that means? It means that he pocketed millions of dollars just through that tax cut. People with incomes of $100,000 a year or more got a 35% tax cut. You know what I think? I think a government that was interested in fairness or balance or maybe a little bit of equality or equity could have gone to those individuals who have the very high incomes and said, "Look, you got the massive tax cut. We need to invest money in health care and in education. You got the huge tax cut. It's time for you to make a greater contribution once again."

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Did the Liberals do that? No. Under their health tax, the Liberals are going to say to Frank Stronach, with a $52-million income, "Frank, can you spare us $900 a year?" Meanwhile, the Liberals are going to go to a hard-working family where the husband has an income of, say, $49,000 a year, and the wife has an income of $49,000 a year, and say, "It's $1,200 a year out of your pocket." I know that Mr McGuinty is character-challenged, and I understand now that he is challenged by numbers as well. It seems to me that when somebody who has a massive income, like Frank Stronach, is only going to make a $900 contribution under this tax, while a middle-income couple—maybe he's a teacher and maybe she's a nurse—is going to have to pay $1,200, I know one thing: That's unfair. That's grossly unfair. But according to the new Liberal version of Ontario, this is the way it's going to be.

It's even more unbalanced than that, as some of my colleagues pointed out here today. In my riding there are a lot of people who do heavy work. They work in the mines; they work in the forests; they work in the paper mill, the pulp mill, the sawmill. It's tough, physical work. Many of them have to go to a chiropractor, not just once a year but 10, 11, 12 times a year. In order to be able to go to work the next day, they have to be able to do that. What does the government say to them now when they have to go to a chiropractor to be able to work, contribute and participate in society? What do the Liberals say? The Liberals say, "You pay for those health services out of your own pocket."

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Private health care.

Mr Hampton: Private health care.

I just heard the Minister of Finance say that that's all fine and wonderful in a Liberal Ontario. In fact, he laughed when we gave him examples: poor immigrant women in downtown Toronto who work as seamstresses,

who, in many cases, work 12 or 15 hours a day in work that requires real precision of eyesight. Women like that have to have their eyes checked once in a while to keep their jobs. They have to be able to go and see an optometrist. What does the Liberal government say to them? "You pay out of your own pocket." Frank Stronach's contribution to the health care system: $900 a year under the Liberal health tax. For these women, I bet going to see the optometrist plus what they will have to pay out of the unbalanced, regressive, unfair health tax will probably be just about equal to Frank Stronach's $900. The Minister of Finance laughed at that example. He thinks that is a trivial matter in his Ontario.

The Liberal government had still other choices. I just gave you the example of those high-income individuals who have incomes of over $100,000 a year, the people who got a 25% tax cut—a 35% tax cut under the Conservatives. I ought to be careful: a 35% tax cut under the Conservatives. The Liberals aren't saying to those people, "You have to make a greater contribution."

There's another example: We have the dedicated employer health tax in this province. The dedicated employer health tax basically says that all employers have to make a contribution toward health care based on the size of their payroll. One of the things the Conservatives did for the largest corporations, the wealthiest corporations—once again, the Nortels, who wouldn't know an honest balance sheet if it jumped up and slapped them on the end of the nose—a $700-million exemption from the employer health tax. I think a Liberal government that had even a sliver of interest in fairness, balance and equality would have gone to those corporations and said, "You know, you got a huge tax cut: $700 million a year. Now that it's time to contribute once again to health care, you have to give that back." But did the Liberals do that? No. The Liberals endorsed the very loophole; the very discredited, dishonourable loophole that the Conservatives put in place, the Liberals are going to continue with.

Every once in a while I love listening to Mr McGuinty and some of the Conservatives talk about the phantom corporate tax cuts that were supposed to happen next year, the year after and the year after that. You see, those tax cuts didn't happen. Yes, they may have happened in 2005, some may have happened in 2006 and they may have happened in 2007, but the fact is that we're in 2004 and they haven't happened yet.

But Liberals brought a bill in here last fall that said, "OK, those proposed tax cuts are off," and they want to pretend that somehow that's real money for them. They want people to partake in this fantasy about whether a tax cut that might happen in 2008 or 2009 is real money in 2004.

I just refuse to take part in that phony—and I say again, phony—exercise. We're talking about real health care, we're talking about real people in this province who need health care today, and they don't have time for any phony exercise about tax cuts that might have happened in 2008-09 between Mr McGuinty and whichever Conservative he happens to be talking about.

The reality is, the corporate tax rate in this province used to be 15.5% on the income of corporations. The Conservatives reduced that. Have the Liberals returned it to 15.5%? No. If the Liberals had increased it, just returned it to the level it was at in the late 1990s, when every corporation in this province was making money hand over fist—had they just done that—it would have been at least another $650 million that could have gone toward health care. Did they do that? No. The Liberals went after modest-income and middle-income working families and said, "You pay it all."

I say again that this is the most regressive budget, in terms of its financial impact on modest- and middle-income working families, that this province has ever seen. I just think it's atrocious that somebody who has an income of $50,000 or $60,000 a year is being told, "You and your wife, because your income together approaches $100,000, have to pay $1,200." Yet the wealthiest corporations in this province, the wealthiest ones, are told by this government, "You don't have to make any additional contribution to health care." I just think that's atrocious.

When you read the fine print of the budget, you find that the wealthiest of the wealthy in this province are actually getting another tax cut. The wealthiest of the wealthy corporations in this province are actually getting another tax cut. I'm talking here about the banks. I invite you and other Ontarians simply to get the latest list of corporate profits for the banks, and it will scare you, because they are really quite something—unbelievable, in fact: not just a billion dollars, but we're talking about dozens of billions of dollars. And do you know what? The banks are going to get another tax cut. It's called the capital tax.

The way the capital tax works is this: When a bank has $40 billion or $50 billion on deposit, that's a lot of wealth. I think you'd admit that's a lot of wealth. That's more wealth than most Ontarians will ever dream of. When somebody is holding that amount of wealth on deposit, it should be subject to some kind of tax. After all, if you're going to say to some poor person who has an income of $49,000 a year that they've got to kick in $600 out of their hard-earned income, I think banks that are holding deposits of $70 billion, $80 billion, $90 billion could afford to pay just a little tax on that.

But do you know what's happening here? Under the Liberal government, the banks, the wealthiest of the wealthy corporations in Ontario, are going to get a reduction in the capital tax. In fact, it's going to eliminated. Do you know what that means? It means another billion-dollar loss, a billion dollars that banks and financial institutions used to contribute that would have been available for health care, the Liberals are going to give away. But at the same time, hard-working, modest- and middle-income families are being told, "You pay it all, $3 billion worth of this government's regressive and unbalanced health care tax."

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Maybe Mr McGuinty and Mr Sorbara could put together some kind of half-baked argument to justify taxing modest- and middle-income families, but do you know what? When you're not going to tax the banks—you're going to give the banks a tax break—when you're not going to tax the highest-income people, who got a 35% tax reduction under the Conservatives, when you're not going to plug the $700-million loophole in the employer health tax which allows the largest corporations in the province to stuff more money in their pockets, when you're not going to restore corporate taxes to the level they were at in the late 1990s, when corporations in Ontario were doing quite fine, thank you, when you're not going to do any of those measures, then you can't go to struggling modest- and middle-income Ontarians and say to them, "You pay it all. You pay $3 billion worth."

But it's worse than that, because it's not just the health tax. When you look at the hydro bill, this government that wants to talk about integrity and wants to talk about how the rules need to be very clear and the accounting has to be very clear has just engaged in the kind of nefarious activity that people from Enron are going to jail for, what I call the hydro shuffle. What they're doing is claiming $3.9 billion of income on hydro contracts that are now going to be pushed on to people's hydro bills and that people will pay for over the next 15 years, at about $300 million a year. It's a completely paper transaction, the kind of paper transaction that Enron engaged in to inflate their revenues and make it look as if they were rolling in the money. It's a complete paper transaction, a paper shuffle. But do you know what it's going to do to working families? Up goes the hydro bill again. Up goes the hydro bill by at least another $20 a year, $30 a year, on top of the 20% increase in the hydro bill that Liberals have already pushed on to working families. So not only are working families going to be told, "We want an extra $1,200 out of your wallet for this unbalanced, unfair health tax," but then they want another $30 out of the wallet for the hydroelectricity shuffle, the Liberals' hydro shuffle, the Enron shuffle.

People in many parts of our province need a driver's licence to be able to drive. That goes up. Who does that hit? Do you think that hurts Mr Stronach? Do you think Frank Stronach, at $52 million a year, is going to be terribly pained by having to pay another $25 or $50 a year for the driver's licence? I don't think so. But let me tell you, for modest- and middle-income working families, who are getting hit by the health tax and the hydro bill, it will hurt them again.

I want people to know that it's not just the driver's licence fee and it's not just the small claims court fee that are going up. There are a whole bunch of other fee increases, $65 million worth of fee increases, that are also scheduled. But do you know when those are going to be made open to the public? In the middle of summer. They're not going to announce those now, but things like fishing licence fees, hunting licence fees, birth certificate fees, change-of-name certificate fees and death certificate fees are all going to be increased this summer too, to the tune of $65 million.

Now, is Frank Stronach, at $52 a million a year, going to get exercised about that? I don't think so. But hard-working modest- and middle-income families are going to be hurt very badly by this. This is the Liberal definition of balance, the Liberal definition of fairness, the Liberal definition of equity and equality: Go after the working people, and go after them with a vengeance.

It's sad to say this, but last fall, Dalton McGuinty was going to those working people, going to the front door and saying, "Working people of Ontario, vote for me." Now, seven months later, he's going to sneak in the back door and take their money. That's what's going on here. That's exactly what's going on. But it doesn't end there, Speaker. You remember that the government said they were going to reduce auto insurance rates by 20%. Well, for working families the auto insurance rates aren't going down by 20%, they're not going down by 10% and they're not going down by 5%. Working families across this province continue to see double-digit increases in their auto insurance premiums—across this province, double-digit increases.

Here's the situation of most working families: The hydro bill goes up, the natural gas bill goes up, the food bill goes up, the auto insurance bill goes up and now health insurance. If they need to see a chiropractor, they pay out of their own pocket. If they need to get their eyes tested at the optometrist, they pay out of their own pocket. That is the situation now, under a Liberal government that had the audacity—the Premier had the audacity to look into the television camera and say to working families, "I won't raise your taxes." And who is he going after? The very people to whom he said, "I won't raise your taxes."

Do a little quick math. Put yourself in the position of that family, where maybe he's a teacher making $50,000 a year, and let's say she's a nurse making $50,000 a year. Right off the top there's $1,200 a year out of their pockets for this tax increase that they're trying to disguise as a health premium. The hydro bill has already gone up by about another $40. Now they're going to add another $20 or $30. If this family has to go to the chiropractor four or five times a year, tack on another $200. If they have to have their eyes checked by an optometrist, maybe once a year, tack on another $100; driver's licence, another $50; all the other fee increases that are coming, the $65-million worth that are coming, another $50 there. Add it up: $1,200, $1,400, $1,500, $1,600, $1700 a year. That's what the Liberal government is taking out of the pockets of modest- and middle-income people as a result of this budget.

What are the banks paying? Nada. They're getting a $1-billion tax reduction. What are all those people who have incomes over $100,000 a year and got the 35% Conservative tax cut paying? Next to nada. All those corporations that got the $700-million windfall as a result of the Conservative loophole in the employer health tax—the largest corporations in Ontario—what are they

paying? Nada. The corporations who benefited from the reduction in the corporate tax rate from 15.5%, which is what it used to be: What are they paying in this budget? Nada. Not a cent. All $3 billion a year is landing on the backs of modest-income and middle-income working families across this province. I say that's unfair. I say that's unbalanced. In fact, I say that's disgusting. That is why this is the most regressive budget ever visited on working families, on modest- and middle-income families in this province.

The average person might be saying, "How can this be?" I think if people want to review a little bit of history, this is in fact the dynamic of the Liberal Party: Promise all kinds of things before the election and do the exact opposite after the election. That is the dynamic of the Liberal Party.

Promise people: "Hey, we know auto insurance rates are too high. We're going to lower them by 20%." What do people get? They get a 20% increase. Promise people, as Mr McGuinty did, to maintain the Conservative rate freeze on electricity prices, and then within two weeks of the election, say, "No, I'm not going to do that," and people's hydro bills go up.

Promise people you're going to do away with private hospitals, the P3 hospitals. We know from British experience and the experience of New Zealand and Nova Scotia that if you look at them 10 years later, they cost double to build and operate. Promise people, as Mr McGuinty did, that you're going to do away with those before the election and then, after the election, change a couple of words in the contract, but otherwise the private hospitals proceed under the Liberals just as they were going to proceed under the Conservatives.

Promise people you're not going allow 6,000 units of development on the Oak Ridges moraine, and then after the election, say, "Oh, well, we're going to protect a smidgen; 5,700 units can proceed."

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Then there's the national child tax benefit, which was supposed to go to the lowest-income families with children. Before the election, Liberals said, "We're going to stop the clawback. All of that money will go to those families, 100% of that money will go to the poorest of poor working families." After the election: "No, never heard of that promise."

They were going to take all the federal money that was designated for child care—I think when you add it all up it comes to close to $300 million federally—and before the election promised that all of that would go to child care. After the election, $58 million will go to child care; the rest, didn't hear of it. Promise that there will be $300 million a year of provincial money for child care, and then after the election, nada, not a cent of provincial money for child care.

Perhaps the most egregious broken promise of all: Go to the parents of children who suffer from autism and say to them that if a Liberal government is elected, those children will not be cut off IBI autism treatment at age six, they will not be discriminated against, and they will continue to receive IBI autism treatment as long as it is helpful and useful to them. Make that promise, and then after the election pretend that those children don't even exist, pretend that those children who struggle with one of hardest handicaps, and who can be helped, don't even exist, that they didn't exist.

That is the modus operandi of Mr McGuinty and the Liberal Party, and I dare say that is the modus operandi of someone named Paul Martin as well: Promise everything before the election, and after the election is over, break all your promises, deny you ever made them.

People should recognize that is how Liberals operate. If I may, that's one of the reasons I think people across Ontario and across Canada increasingly have grown cynical about politics, when they see this kind of behaviour.

I want to roll back the clock a bit. One of the excuses Mr McGuinty uses is that there is a deficit. He says there's a deficit. I sat in the estimates committee last year in June. Eleven months ago I sat in the estimates committee with Mr Phillips, who is now the Chair of Management Board, and we both questioned the former Minister of Finance, Janet Ecker. I added up all the areas of the budget where it was obvious the former government didn't have the money, where they weren't getting revenue or they were going to have extra costs. I added it up and said, "It looks to me like you've got a $5-billion deficit."

Mr Phillips, now Chair of Management Board, said exactly the same thing. He looked at Mrs Ecker and said, "Looking at it now, in June 2003, I think you're really at risk of a $5-billion deficit."

You'd think that a prudent Premier or a prudent leader of a political party would say, "Boy, if there's a risk of $5-billion deficit, maybe we shouldn't promise to do all these things without raising taxes." But did that stop Mr McGuinty? No. He promised that there would be billions of dollars of investment for health care and education and children and municipalities and the environment—and no tax increase—knowing that there was a likelihood of a $5-billion deficit on top of that.

The now minister of public security, Mr Kwinter, said in August to Canadian Press, "There's a $5-billion deficit." The Fraser Institute, which the Minister of Finance often cites when he wants to disagree with me over auto insurance premiums, said in the first two weeks of the election, "There's at least $4.6-billion deficit."

I knew there was a deficit, Mr Phillips knew there was a deficit, Mr Kwinter knew there was a deficit and the Fraser Institute knew there was a deficit, yet Mr McGuinty went across the province saying to people, "Billions of dollars for health care, billions of dollars for education; no tax increases."

I don't know what Liberals call that, but I call that a complete black-and-white, out-and-out contradiction. You can't have a $4-billion deficit or a $5-billion deficit and tell people that you're going to invest billions in health care and billions in education and not raise taxes. You can't do it, but you did. You did. You went out there

and told people things that you knew were not factually true. Now you come to people and say to them, "Oh, you know there's not enough money for health care." You knew then that there wasn't enough money for health care. You knew then there wasn't enough money.

That's bad enough, but most egregious of all, whom do they go after for the $3 billion? They don't go after the wealthiest, not the corporations that got the tax loopholes, not the banks; they go after modest- and middle-income Ontarians, modest- and middle-income working families who are struggling hard just to pay the other bills.

There's no secret about why this budget is so unpopular—no secret. They tried to say, "You know, there are going to be more nurses and more of this and more of that." Do you know what I say? After all of these broken promises, after all of these so obviously broken promises, why should any person in Ontario believe any promise any Liberal makes? Do you know what? I've asked that question of Mr McGuinty for the last two days and I've asked that question of Mr Sorbara, and they can't answer, probably because they don't have an answer. Certainly they don't want to try to answer it. Why would any Ontarian believe any promise any Liberal makes after all the broken promises, after all the misrepresentation of what is going on?

I say to working people across the province, raise your voices, write letters to the editor of your paper, get on the open-line radio shows and speak, write to your MPPs, get on the Internet and tell people how upset you are, how unfair you find this to be. That's the only way you'll be able to hold this government to account. That's only way you'll force this government to recognize their own unfairness, their own unbalanced budget, their own attempt to stick modest- and middle-income working families with a $3-billion bill.

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I note there's a federal election coming, and I just want to say few words about that. We saw all the promises Liberals made here in the province and now we see all the broken promises, and I can't help but comment on Paul Martin.

Paul Martin was the Minister of Finance when the biggest cuts to medicare were ever made in Canada. Do you know that? In the 1993 and 1994 federal budgets, the biggest cuts to health care, the biggest cuts to medicare ever in the history of Canada, came under Paul Martin. We see cities struggling. The biggest cuts to housing and to municipalities ever by a federal government happened under Paul Martin.

I remember that federal Minister of Finance. He used to advertise himself as knowing where every dollar went, being totally on top of the situation. Now we find out that under his watch $100 million went missing in the province of Quebec under the federal sponsorship program. Do you know what he says? You must remember that show Hogan's Heroes. Whenever a prisoner escaped, Sergeant Schultz would say: "I see nothing. I hear nothing. I know nothing." Now we see another Liberal response.

I just say to people, you look at the promises that were made over the last year by Liberals, look at all the promises that have been broken and now look at how unfair, how unbalanced this budget is to modest- and middle-income working families, and you ask yourself, can you trust any promise any Liberal makes?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Questions and comments?

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I take pleasure in rising and taking a couple of minutes at this point in response to the leader of the third party's comments with respect to the budget.

I'll just tell you that I ran for office provincially because the people of Ontario in my riding told me clearly they wanted a change in government, that they were tired of the actions of the former government, and they were tired, quite frankly, in particular of the disregard for those most vulnerable in our communities.

This budget has addressed, to a large extent, the very people who have been coming through my constituency door on the Fridays that I can spend there in the briefings with organizations and individuals who have come to plead with us to ensure that those who are vulnerable in our community, those whom they represent, get acknowledged.

This budget has done exactly that. This budget has provided for the first increase in many years for those who rely on disability payments, a 3% increase—modest but the first time in many years. Similarly in Ontario Works, albeit a modest increase, those who are vulnerable in our community and depend upon government for their very livelihood got some acknowledgment.

For those who have the lowest incomes in our province, the necessary health premiums won't apply to those with taxable incomes under $20,000. For those young people with mental health issues—I was visited yesterday by Kinark, an agency that supplies mental health care. An additional $25 million in this budget is directed to children's mental health, growing over the course of the four-year plan to some $38 million.

There are many examples, and I'll have the opportunity to present more of them during the ongoing debate, but those who are vulnerable in our community are being addressed by this budget and being addressed by the Liberal values we bring to the Legislature.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to participate in the debate and to comment on the remarks made by the member for Kenora-Rainy River. While he and I don't often agree on issues, I can tell you that I certainly support him in his remarks relative to this debate.

The fact remains that we are debating an issue now in the House that shouldn't even be here. The truth is that this budget is really fraudulent when it comes to the fact that we are now faced with billions of dollars of tax increases that, according to legislation in place in the province, the Taxpayer Protection Act, should have been

put to the people of Ontario for the purpose of receiving approval.

As the member for Kenora-Rainy River indicated, this budget is really going to be hurting people of low income. One aspect of this, for example, is the 50% increase—

Interjection.

Mr Klees: The member opposite laughs about the 50% increase in the cost of a driver's licence. The poorest of the poor in this province have to drive their cars. You just shrug it off and think it's very funny that people, who obviously don't live in your neighbourhood—they don't live in Mr Caplan's neighbourhood, but throughout my constituency there are people who cannot find 25 extra dollars to put on the table as a result of this attack on ordinary people in Ontario.

You should be ashamed of yourself. It's constituency week, and when you go back home you will hear from people in your constituency. You'll come back here with a different vision.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is indeed a privilege to stand and comment on the rather excellent speech made by the leader of the NDP.

It is difficult for many people to fathom what is contained in a budget. The Minister of Finance stood up and talked for an hour and a half, and the budget contained many provisions. There were so many facts and figures bandied about that it's positively impossible for the average person, on first blush, to understand what is in the budget, what is going to happen, what kinds of programs are going to be added to and taken away from.

But I think it all comes down to this: When you have in the clear light of day an opportunity to look, Mr Hampton has it right: The average middle- and modest-income family is going to be seeing about $1,500 taken directly out of their pocketbooks—$1,500 they can ill afford. A family of modest to middle income—

Interjections.

Mr Prue: Mr Speaker, I'd like to be able to hear myself. OK?

Families of modest to middle income struggle to pay things like the gas, like the shoes on their kids' feet. They struggle to pay for hydro. Now they're looking at 1,500 extra dollars as a result of this budget. I have to tell you, most of them have not counted on this expenditure. They have not counted on the expenditure because they were led to believe by this government, by this party, that the money was there, that they were not going to be taxed. Now they're finding out that not only are they going to pay that much more, but services they once relied on are going to be delisted. This is a budget that very much hurts the poor.

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): It's my honour to join my colleagues in this budget debate. This budget debate is about our government's firm commitment to improve the health care system in this province.

Our government has a goal of establishing 150 family health care teams in this province. What will these family health care teams do? They will give a continuity of care in this province. They will reduce emergency times in hospitals in this province. There will also be after-hours coverage for patients by these family health care teams. These family health care teams will work together on an interdependent basis and will help each other. It's multidisciplinary team care.

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This budget talks about having good public education in our schools. Our schools will produce reduced class sizes. The class size will be reduced to 20 students up to grade 3 in this province.

I support this budget because it is a budget which shows our government's commitment to improve the health care system and the public education system. It's a four-year plan. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: For a response, the Chair recognizes the member from Kenora-Rainy River.

Mr Hampton: I appreciate the contributions of other members. I just want to say, particularly to Liberal members, that I look forward to your continuing to make these promises across the province, because the other reality of your budget is that, if you look at it on a year-over-year basis, you are imposing a reduction in the amount of money that hospitals will have to work with. Because of the growing population, because of the aging population, because of new technologies in health care, hospitals have to manage greater and greater demands all the time. You are literally saying to hospitals that they are not going to have as much money to deal with those demands as they've had in the past.

I know from having been around here for 17 years what that means. It means those hospitals will begin cutting programs. It means they will be saying to nurses and other hospital staff, "Sorry, we don't have the budget. We have to lay you off." I know what it's like when you have to negotiate with the Ontario Medical Association. The Ontario Medical Association will want substantial increases in pay, and when you pay those increases in pay, you are not going to have the money left for these promises that you've made.

As one who said that your whole program as outlined over the last year is completely riddled with contradictions, I look forward to your continuing to make these promises around the province. I'm going to follow you around from one community to another, and as the layoffs of nurses and the cutbacks in hospital services happen, I'll be there to say again, "Why did you believe these Liberals and their promises after they've broken so many promises already?" Why would anyone believe a Liberal any more and the promises they make?

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Eglinton-Lawrence.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): The leader of the third party talks about broken promises. I think he is the godfather of broken promises. Do you remember something that he promised he would deliver when they were elected? He said he was going to bring in public

auto insurance—never did it. I also remember he said he was going to respect workers. Remember that?

Interjection.

Mr Colle: He is screaming now because he doesn't want to hear the truth. He always thinks he can scream at people.

What about the social contract?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Would the member just take his seat.

Mr Hampton: Mr Speaker, I apologize—

The Acting Speaker: Is this a point of order?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: OK, you had your time.

Mr Colle: Sorry, Mr Speaker. I shouldn't have got the leader of the third party so agitated here, because the truth does hurt.

I don't really diminish some of the points that you've made. I think the leader of the third party has made some reasonable points. I don't disagree with that. But the one thing I want to point out is that there's maybe a bit of a difference in perspective here.

In this budget, one of the things we're saying, which hasn't been done in a while, is that by investing in health care, we're not just investing in the traditional silos of health care. I think all governments, whether it be the NDP government, the Conservative government or our government, know that you've got to—I was going to say "reinvent." I don't like that word, "reinvent" government, but you've got to reinvent health care and invest in it to make it different, to make it more effective, to deliver more services. It's not just hospitals any more. I think that's what the leader of the third party doesn't understand.

In this budget, we've invested an impressive amount of money in long-term-care facilities and nursing homes—$190 million—to improve the quality of care there, because if people aren't taken care of properly in long-term-care facilities, they end up in our hospitals. If people aren't taken care of in their homes with proper home care, they end up in our hospitals. We've made a substantive investment in home care in this budget—over $400 million—to get home care to people in their apartments and in their homes so that they can have the home care they need and they don't have to go into hospitals.

That's why we're also investing in preventive health care right from our grade schools in the education ministry, where we're saying we need to have more money for breakfast programs and more investment in immunization. In fact, I had an interesting discussion with my daughter yesterday, who just gave birth to our first grandchild a few months ago. Actually, some of us elected MPPs have a life outside of this place. Anyway, I was discussing the budget with her, and I did mention, because the budget is quite a lengthy document, that one of the things I thought was good and innovative is that we put a substantial amount of money into free vaccinations and immunizations for children who need them to prevent meningitis, pneumonia and chicken pox. My daughter said to me, "I'm going to save $600." Now, $600 is a lot of money to save, whether it's my daughter or any young mother or couple.

So that is how this budget is different. I think the third party's approach is really wallowing in the past, trying to look at things as they did 20 years ago. That's why this budget is saying that the money we need to deliver health care services has to be used also in terms of getting rid of the silos that separate hospitals from home care providers and from—for instance, I think a very effective tool of delivering health care in our communities is the community health centre. We've got about 54 of them in Ontario, and this is going to increase their budget and hopefully get them more integrated into the health care delivery system in Ontario. That's just another example, but it all adds up to making health care work for people in the decades to come, not the decades gone by. I think the third party is looking at health care in a rear-view mirror. We're trying to look ahead to see what we can do, because that's what we've been told by health economists. Whether it be Michael Decter or Michael Rachlis, they all tell us the same thing: "You can't just write cheques like the Tories did year after year, close hospitals and cut back on nurses. That doesn't work."

That's why we are saying we have to invest in nurses, we have to invest in prevention. The total package of health care goes beyond just hospitals. That's why we're delivering over $2.4 billion into health care, not only to sustain it but to make it capable of sustaining future challenges. We can't keep doing things as we've been in the past. I should mention that this budget is about more than just health care and education. Those are our two primary goals, because those are the two most critical services in need of huge reinvestment.

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I should mention education. There's an investment of an extra $1,100 per student. There's investment in training 1,000 extra students in teachers' college. There's an investment in literacy and numeracy, to improve the standards in those basic areas. That's where the money is going to increase student achievement.

There's another thing I'm very happy about. The budget was really praised by Mayor Miller of Toronto and Mayor McCallion of Mississauga. Ann Mulvale, of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, said that this budget fulfills that commitment of putting part of the existing gas tax—it will start at one cent in October—into funding public transit. For the first time in the history of the province, we have shown the innovative approach of taking a dedicated portion of a gas tax and putting it toward public transit. I think that has been extremely well received. Not only is it going to improve transit in Markham, in Oakville and in Mississauga, but it's also going to mean better air quality.

The municipalities, which represent the local property taxpayers, also like it, because we're respecting the fact that they have pressures they can't cope with as a result of the former downloading. That's why we'll also begin

the uploading of health care. Public health is now going to be up to 75% paid for by the province. That's why the cities and local taxpayers get relief in this budget. I think that's why it's beneficial.

One of the comments I've gotten from seniors' groups, seniors who liked this budget, is for the first time since 1992, we've increased the property tax credit for seniors who are in their own homes or who rent a home or an apartment. An extra $85 million will go into the pockets of seniors in this province: 685,000 seniors will enjoy more money as a result of a credit for low- and modest-income seniors. They will get a bit of a break, whether they're a tenant or a homeowner. That is up to $625 per household. That's something that you're not going to hear about from the doom-and-gloom party or the naysayers, but that's a very positive thing that helps our hard-working seniors, along with the extra home care we're going to give our seniors, and I think that's a significant part of this budget.

It's also important to note that the Ministry of the Environment is going to be up to and beyond where it has been in funding for eight years. The Ministry of the Environment is going to get the money it needs to clean our watersheds and to clean water at source, and ensure another Walkerton never occurs. So the funding is being restored to the Ministry of the Environment.

I would also say that one of the things we're doing for small and medium business, too, is the beginning of the removal of that job-killer tax, the capital tax, which is not a tax on a business's income; it's basically a tax on your property or assets, even though you could be losing money as a small or medium business—or a business of any size. So we're beginning to phase that out very moderately. I think that's good for business because, let's face it, we need more than government expenditures to pay for the health care we need, for the schools we need; we also need to create revenue to pay for our health care, our environmental protection and our schools.

This budget has also been very well received, from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to small business people and, as I said, to mayors all across the province, and even to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. They understand that this is not punitive to their efforts to create jobs. We need the jobs in order that people have incomes, but also so that we can have the revenues to provide those essential services.

That's why I think this budget is a different kind of budget. It's innovative and it begins the improvements of services that all Ontarians expected and hopefully we can achieve as we go through this budget process.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It is my pleasure to rise in the Ontario legislative chamber and speak to the 2004-05 budget of the new government of Ontario.

Though it is by no means my first opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of Mississauga West in this Legislature, I have not yet given my maiden speech. As such, I request the indulgence of the Speaker and of my fellow members on all sides to address the government's maiden budget with my maiden speech.

I represent Mississauga West, a community making the transition from suburb to big city. Mississauga celebrates its 30th anniversary as a city in this year of 2004. The city was incorporated to gather together a number of communities that had grown up as farming settlements in the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, Streetsville, a part of Mississauga, has a rich history as a farm community reaching back into the 19th century. Founded by Timothy Street, it was home to a power dam, held agricultural fairs and had an important rail link through the town. Streetsville sent a band of young men from the community off to fight for Canada in the Great War of 1914 to 1918. Those who returned founded the Great War Veterans' Association that exists today as the Streetsville legion. Some of Streetsville's turn-of-the-century homes still exist, and its original high school is now the Kinsmen Centre on Queen Street, today's main thoroughfare.

Streetsville's most famous citizen, however, was born on Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula and played semi-pro women's hockey in her youth. Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion represented Streetsville as ward 9 councillor before being elected mayor in 1978, an office she has held for more than 25 consecutive years. When one thinks of the world's great mayors, some of those great mayoral names are Canadian. Charlotte Whitten of Ottawa and Jean Drapeau of Montreal both guided their cities through their defining years, just as Mayor Hazel McCallion has guided Mississauga through its transition from a loose collection of post-war farming communities into Canada's sixth-largest city. Mayor McCallion now deservedly occupies a plateau of greatness with the likes of legendary mayors such as Jerusalem's Teddy Kollek, New York's Ed Koch and Berlin's Willy Brandt. I salute our mayor's limitless energy and her lifetime of service and contributions to the city and to the country she loves with such a fiery passion.

For me, my path to the Ontario Legislature began by seeing how a few good people could come together, organize for their common good and bring about a change in the community that I grew up in, in suburban Montreal, a town called Pierrefonds.

My father ran the local homeowners' association. Along with other homeowners' association heads, he helped change the city administration on three separate occasions. I watched a good mayor we helped elect—at that age my part was delivering leaflets—go down to defeat through voter apathy by a mere five votes. I learned about getting out the vote before I was 12 years old. The third and last time we changed civic administrations in Pierrefonds, I was studying physics at Concordia University. I helped draft and design the new mayor's campaign literature and ran a polling place. That mayor, Cy MacDonald, served our community with distinction for almost 20 years.

To commemorate my late father's civic contributions, there is a rue Delaney in my hometown of Pierrefonds,

Quebec. I have no doubt that in the hereafter, my father is enjoying this moment, as his name of Alvin Emmett Delaney goes into Hansard and into history in Ontario. I am sure he would be proud that the name of his son, Robert Patrick Delaney, will one day be inscribed into the marble of the Legislative Assembly building here at Queen's Park.

By my mid-20s, I had moved from the Montreal area, briefly lived and worked in Metro Toronto, and had moved to Vancouver, British Columbia. While I pursued my MBA at Simon Fraser University, I was building my social circle through the British Columbia Liberal Party. I met a young cabinet minister, Jean Chrétien, as a Trudeau cabinet minister just after he, Bill Davis and Roy Romanow had been the pivotal figures in bringing home our Canadian Constitution. And I met Pierre Elliott Trudeau on three separate occasions. Lots of people have known him longer and lots of people have known him better, but that was all I needed to solidify the Liberal values I now put to work in the government I serve and represent with pride.

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Students have sometimes asked me which party they should join. I tell them to look for the party in which they feel a kinship with the people in it, call the people in it friends, and share their homes and their lives with ease. If you can do that, you're in the right ideological home, because most of the political battles one seems to fight are with members of your own party and not the party you spend the bulk of your time organizing to oppose. If after your infighting is over, you can still claim kinship and affection for the people around you, then you're in the right political party.

I feel privileged to serve with the men and women in this government of Ontario, whose company I enjoy for its own sake. As such, I'm proud to call myself a Liberal.

Like six other members elected for the first time in 2003, I stood for election in 1999, lost, regained my nomination and won in 2003. It's not easy to lose, but in picking up the pieces and reinventing the team and the campaign all over again, I and my colleagues learned the value of commitment, of perseverance and of team-building.

Some of the fine men and women I would never have met, save through politics, deserve a mention in this address: our first Mississauga West riding association president, Joe Pathyil, and our current president, Clinton Smith; my old friend and tireless comrade Bruce Cooper, and Abdul Hafeez Khan, our campaign chair and my good friend.

It took the efforts of three successive campaign managers over 22 months to get me here: Kiril Yordanov, Marshal Fernandes and Wilf Ramey. I thank and salute them.

My personal mentor in Ontario politics is no stranger to Queen's Park. Steven Offer served as the MPP for the former riding of Mississauga North between 1985 and 1995. I salute Steve for the example he set and I thank him for the opportunity to learn Mississauga politics, working on his behalf.

Another close friend, Peter Francis Huntley, worked with me patiently as we learned to engineer a pattern of consistently superior decisions as a campaign team. I enjoyed Peter's friendship and that of his wife inside and outside politics. In recent years, he battled diabetes and two types of cancer. He knew of the victory that our team won and that he helped build before he died this past March. I remember Peter Francis Huntley from the legislative chamber that he helped me reach.

A very special lady continues to play a big role in my life. Andrea Seepersaud, my partner in life, comes from a political family in Georgetown, Guyana. Andrea's father, Cecil Seepersaud, represented the People's Progressive Party in the Guyana Legislature for a term. Her brother-in-law, Bayney Karran, is currently Guyana's ambassador to the United States of America. The glow of Andrea's love and her unwavering support was my secret in crossing the threshold into Ontario public life. I hope Andrea and I may see and share together all that Ontario public life offers.

The growth that public life requires and the sacrifices it takes are gifts no money can buy and experience no educational institution can bestow. In my brief time here, I've seen character and wisdom from members of all three parties, and also from the dedicated men and women within the Ontario Legislative Assembly who make sense of our activities and make government in Ontario function, based on our deliberations.

Democracy in any jurisdiction is always a work in progress, an experiment redefined time and again through the years. Democracy and all that contributes to building and preserving it is truly a journey rather than a destination.

I thank the people in Mississauga West who sent me here. I'm grateful for those I have come to know while I have served here. I'm excited about the privilege and the responsibility of the service I can render as a member of provincial Parliament. I look forward to the years ahead. I am confident that a new and challenging opportunity to help build my community, my province and my country awaits with each sunrise.

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr Klees: I'm pleased to respond to the comments made by the two members of the Liberal Party. First, with regard to comments made by the member for Eglinton-Lawrence, I would say that he has, unfortunately, resorted to a script that has been given to him by his party, no doubt, trying to justify a budget that I know under other circumstances, if he weren't the parliamentary assistant, he would also see the devastating effect this budget is going to have on many people in the province of Ontario.

With regard to the comments from the member from Mississauga West, I want to say that I have observed one thing about the member over the short time I have gotten to know him in this House, and that is that he takes the business of government very seriously. I am sure he will

contribute significantly to the work of this Legislature in the time he has here.

I also note that he very strategically took advantage of this budget speech to in fact give his maiden speech, and that allowed him to speak on issues other than the budget itself, because I can tell you that from what I know of the character of the member from Mississauga West, he could not have truthfully stood in his place and spoken in support of the budget.

So what the members of his constituency know is that they at least have a man of integrity supporting them and working for them, because I don't believe the member from Mississauga West will ever stand in his place in this House and say that the budget bill that is presented here is good for the people of Ontario.

Ms Martel: I want to make my comments with respect to the remarks made by the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, who was talking about the NDP somehow living in the past when it came to health care. I wondered if he was having a slight case of amnesia. The biggest expansion in CHCs, community health centres, came under the NDP government. It was under our government. We were the government that also established the aboriginal community health centres. So if you want to talk about being supportive of community health centres, the biggest expansions came under us.

It was our government that regulated midwives, for example. It was our government that started the nurse practitioner program. It was our government—as I'm reading this article on diabetes—that established the northern diabetes program so that services for diabetics could be spread across all communities in northern Ontario and they wouldn't have to come to the big regional centres for diabetic care. So if you want to talk about change, we made lots of positive changes, very progressive changes, under our government. I just wanted to remind you of that.

Let's go to your daughter, who is not going to have to pay $600 a year for immunization. You know what, Mike? If she made $48,000 a year before she went off on maternity leave, now she's going to pay $600 a year for the new health tax. How much further ahead are she and other working families if they are going to be paying that kind of new health care premium? Think about that. If she makes $48,000 a year, she is going to pay $600 a year in her new health tax.

You see, all of the changes you want to bring in are being made off the backs of low- and modest-income individuals, who are now going to have to pay a new health fee over and above the health care they pay in their taxes, over and above the cost they have to pay out of pocket now for optometrists, chiropractors and physiotherapists. If you wanted to find money for health, why didn't you reverse the 35% income tax cut? Why didn't you close the loophole in the employer health tax? Why didn't you go back to the corporate rates in 1999? You would have raised $2.4 billion doing that. Instead, you're going to do it on the backs of low- and modest-income Ontarians.

Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): It's a great pleasure to rise today and comment on our Liberal Party's first budget. Today and this week, the roles in our House have become fixed. The Liberal party is leading and the Conservative Party stands in carping opposition, backed up by the NDP in carping opposition.

As we lay out our platform, this is not just the role of leadership to actually put forward a platform that declares our values, but it is also our platform that was put together after great consultation and listening to the people of Ontario. This will also be the first of probably four or five budgets, and in the next four or five budgets we will be monitoring, changing and continuing to listen to the people of Ontario as we continue to lead and as the other parties continue to carp and try to pull us down and destroy as we build.

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There has been a major change in philosophy in this party and its ability to do things. That change has been that we will no longer cut back the size of government and cut back services, but we will charge people for the services and account for them in a very sustainable and forthright manner. Our government is putting to bed the concept that you do not have to give full accountability in the books. With our new legislation, everyone will have complete and transparent access to the books, so there will never again be a debate on whether it was a $5.6-billion, $6.2-billion or zero deficit going into the election.

Mr Klees: Or playing games with the numbers.

Mr Peterson: Absolutely. We will not be playing games with the numbers, as Mr Klees has so properly said, and as he did when he was in the leadership. We'll look forward to this evolution as we evolve as a leader and as the other parties continue to evolve in opposition.

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): Certainly all would realize here in the House that politics is a very serious business, and the public at large realizes that each of the parties will take credit for that which happens when they're in power or blame the other people as a result of that. But people also look at how it's handled. Do you take ownership and responsibility for the actions that you've now brought upon yourself or enhanced, or do you just pass the buck and blame everybody else? I think that all parties in some way, shape or form do the same thing.

It was yesterday morning in my constituency when Mr Jim Bedford walked into the office, and he was fuming mad. He's a retired CAW worker and he was venting on somebody and I was standing there and he was coming at me. He spoke to me, and he wanted me to mention his name in the House. He felt that communism was dead, but it was alive and well here after the budget. I said to him that I would mention what he said in the Legislature, and I am doing that today.

We explained the process and at the end of it he shook my hand and said, "Keep up the work." We'll do what we can and how we can.

There were a large number of things that were mentioned here. We mentioned the 8,000 new nurses in

the budget, yet when I meet with nurses, they tell me that there are going to be 8,000 retiring. It doesn't say 8,000 net new nurses. It says 8,000 new nurses. So are we replacing those who are retiring, or are we bringing new nurses in? Those are some of the things we have.

When I was at the local school, the principal was saying to me that in his grade 3 classes he had one class of 23 and a class of 24. How is that going to impact him? He had to bring in two portables. How was that going to play out and where was the cost going to come? What was going to take place in grade 4 when those grade 3s graduated? Was there now going to be a class of 40-odd kids?

The reality is that people look at the way things happen. The school boards will assess what they have to work with and make those decisions, and we as politicians do the best we can.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Colle: I want to thank all the members for their comments—I may not agree with them, but they were good comments—and the member for Mississauga West for his maiden speech. I thought it was heartfelt.

I just want to say that the challenge we have before us is trying to sometimes make the opposition parties understand that by increasing our revenue—which we had to do. As you know, our expenditures in three years in the province of Ontario have been increasing by 22% and our revenues are minus 0.6%, so we've got a gap. We have to find some way of funding health care, education, cities and so forth. At least with the health premium, we're able to have money put aside for these health improvements. That means that we can still have some money for education, cities and the environment. It's all connected. Whether it's my daughter or any other Ontarian, they understand that this is not just about one thing. Everything is connected.

This budget is a comprehensive four-year plan that looks at improving performances right across all ministries. As the member for Mississauga South said, it's about looking ahead; it's about leadership. The NDP always claim they want to spend more tax dollars for services, yet when we had a proposal to roll back the Tory corporate tax cut, they said no. They voted with the Tories to keep the corporate tax cut. They tell us we are not being hard enough on the corporations, yet they voted no when we tried to roll back that corporate tax. The NDP always want it both ways. Sorry; you can't have it both ways all the time.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Oak Ridges.

Mr Klees: I'm pleased to participate in this debate. Dalton McGuinty and this Liberal government are not only breaking their promise to the people of Ontario as a result of this budget in which there are multi-billions of new taxes, user fees, and various other ways of getting at the pocketbook of the people of Ontario, not only are they breaking their promise to the people of Ontario, they are also breaking the law.

I put a question to the Minister of Finance earlier today in question period, and the question I put to the Minister of Finance was: Does he recall the oath of office that he took when he came to this place, through which we, as members of the Legislature, made a commitment, swore an oath, to uphold the laws of this province? To his credit, he admitted in his response that he remembered it, and he still believes that it's his responsibility to uphold the law of this land, to uphold the laws and statutes of the province of Ontario.

You'll also know that in my follow-up question to the Minister of Finance, I then put to him how he can then justify bringing in this budget, which increases taxes to the people of Ontario, to the hard-working families of Ontario, which is in fact against the law, because we have legislation in place in this province, a statute called the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999. That legislation, that statute, that law makes it very clear that a referendum is required to be held to authorize increased taxes. Very specifically, a referendum under law is required to implement the very specific provisions of this budget bill.

The Minister of Finance, of course, sidestepped that issue. He simply shrugged it off. Isn't it interesting that in their budget bill, this government, through tabling their legislation, is going to provide a loophole for themselves so that they can in fact do precisely what the law of this province indicates is illegal.

I have grave concern that if we, as a legislative body here, are not willing to respect the law of this province, how can we expect anyone else to? Just because we have the ability, and particularly now the Liberal Party and the Premier, with a majority behind him, has the ability to walk in here and simply introduce legislation that allows him to do what is illegal? What's wrong with that picture?

Well, I believe it's wrong, and I know we'll be joined by members of my caucus who will support me in a private member's bill that I will be bringing forward to the House.

I tabled a resolution today, and that resolution reads as follows:

"Be it resolved that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario comply with section 2 of the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999 that requires a referendum to be held to authorize the following provisions in a bill that receives first reading in 2004."

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Then the resolution makes reference to the specific budget bill that's being brought forward by this government. First, "A provision that amends the Income Tax Act to establish a new tax called the Ontario health premium...." Second, "A provision that amends section 4.1 of the Income Tax Act to provide that the tax payable by a qualifying environmental trust for a taxation year shall be calculated at the same rate as the specified basic rate of tax payable by a corporation under subsection 38(2) of the Corporations Tax Act."

The reason I've incorporated that into the resolution is because that is a second aspect under which this

government now is seeking a loophole because it too represents a true tax increase.

Paragraph 2 of the resolution reads, "Despite section 17 of Bill 83 (An Act to implement Budget Measures, introduced on May 18, 2004), the government of Ontario is in contravention of the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999 if a bill receives first reading that includes the provisions described in paragraph 1 before a referendum is held to authorize those provisions."

That's a resolution that I've tabled. As I indicated, I will also be tabling a specific private member's bill that will deal with this, and we will have debate in this Legislature on that issue.

I have also asked a question of the Premier in question period, whether he will allow a free vote on that bill when it comes before the House for debate. The reason for that is that I know that many members of the Liberal caucus are not feeling very comfortable about having campaigned committing not to increase taxes on the one hand and, on the other hand, to honour the law of the land, namely, the Taxpayer Protection Act.

I would hope that at least members of the Liberal caucus would want to exercise their right to support my bill and to go to the people of Ontario through a referendum to get the mandate for the tax increases they're proposing in the budget. I'm not asking them to sidestep their support for increased taxes. After all, that is the Liberal way, and it has been forever: tax and spend. That's nothing new, so I don't ask them to veer from that way of doing business. What I think their constituents should be able to count on, though, is that they would deal with legislation in a way that at least respects the law of this land, the law of the province of Ontario.

What they will have to answer for is increased taxes to hard-working families in light of their promise not to increase taxes. I can share with you that I have today—these are just a few of the e-mails we have received in our office here at Queen's Park in response to an article in the Toronto Sun this morning, in which it was made public that I would be introducing that private member's bill and that I would also be preparing a petition that people in the province can participate in.

I'd like to read you some of those responses. This comes from people who are concerned, as you and I are, that things in the Legislature be done in accordance with the law and that people should be able to count on their Premier to keep his word.

If I might, "If I lied on my resumé and those lies were discovered, I would be immediately terminated. Why is it that McGuinty can do this so brazenly and yet still remain in office?" Interesting question.

"Dear Mr Klees:

"I'm appalled at the Ontario Liberals' broken promises regarding the latest tax hikes. I know that the Liberals will use the health premiums to help pay for health care but then will use the other tax revenues to blow on their pet social programs. I'm also aware that you can't throw money at health care to fix it. I support your actions. Stop this insanity."

"Dear Frank:

"I want a referendum. These tax increases stink. Anyone can increase a tax. A real leader finds solutions. I don't understand how a politician can publicly lie and not be held accountable. We all know during the Liberal election campaign the promises Dalton made. We voted on trust. We voted on the information communicated to the public. We voted no new taxes and a balanced budget."

Next: "Thank you for asking Premier McGuinty to honour his election promises to not raise taxes. Please pass along some gratuitous and unsolicited advice in the matter of honesty." I can't read the rest of it because of some unparliamentary language contained therein.

That is an example of what people across this province are feeling about how this government is conducting its business, so we prepared a petition. The petition is now available on my Web site and will be available across the province. In fairness, I would like to suggest that members of the Liberal caucus may want to access a copy of this petition as well and have it available in your constituency office for your constituents to sign. We're going to ask them to call your constituency office to see if in fact you have the courage to place this in front of your own constituents so they can tell you how they feel. Let's see how openly and honestly you really are willing to consult on this important issue.

The petition reads as follows:

"Petition to Force Premier McGuinty to Obey the Taxpayer Protection Law.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11, 2003, promising not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum, and he also promised in TV ads not to raise taxes by 'one penny' on 'working families'; and

"Whereas Mr McGuinty is breaking those promises with tax increases that could cost working families as much as $2,000 a year; and

"Whereas Mr McGuinty pledged in writing to obey the taxpayer protection law, which requires a referendum before increasing taxes;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to force the Premier to put all of his proposed tax hikes to a referendum."

That petition, as I indicated, is available on my Web site. It is available from my office. It should be available in every MPP's office, because the people of the province surely have the right to express their views.

I find it interesting that the Minister of Finance on a number of occasions over the last few days, when asked about this issue of a referendum, replied by saying, "Well, we've consulted enough, and, besides, it would cost some $40 million to have this referendum." I find that interesting, because in questions to the Minister of Finance in this House over the last couple weeks, I put it

to him that I had it on good authority from Elections Ontario that there in fact were consultations with the government inquiring about setting up the mechanics of a referendum. The minister denied that any such discussions had ever taken place. Clearly, the fact of the matter is that some discussions must have taken place; otherwise, how would the Minister of Finance know that it would cost $40 million to do the referendum? So it's clear that those discussions were taking place, and I suggest this to you: The Minister of Finance had very good advice from his advisers that in order to proceed with his budget he would have to have a referendum. However, what he decided to do was to brazenly push forward, ignore that advice, and simply expect that the people of this province will forgive and forget, and simply bend over and let this government do whatever it chooses to do.

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Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): That's not a very parliamentary thing to say.

Mr Klees: I'm not sure what the member opposite indicated about what I'm referring to being unparliamentary. This is very serious. She's laughing. She thinks it's quite hilarious. I'm going to suggest to the member opposite, although this is her first term in office, that these are matters not to be laughed at, that her constituents will not be laughing with her, that her constituents take this very seriously. And they, as a political party and as a government, will have to answer for their callous actions in this regard.

The people of this province expect integrity from their leaders, from their elected members. Whether we argue or debate, and we can disagree with the details of this budget, the one thing that I believe everyone in this province, regardless of partisan affiliation, will agree with is that they should be able to rely on integrity when it comes to leadership. That is not present in the Premier or any member who supports the Premier in making a commitment and then turning about and breaking that promise, and then on top of that, breaking the law of this province with regard to raising taxes. That is devoid of integrity. There is no integrity in that, and that's what this political party, this government, is going to be answering for.

I have many e-mails from people across this province. I'm not just talking about people in my riding. These are e-mails from every riding across the province. These are ordinary, hard-working families who are saying, "Enough is enough. Stop this madness." Many of these e-mails are saying, "Let alone a referendum, what can we do to call this Premier back? What can we do to call back this government that was given a mandate by the people of Ontario on, obviously, a very false commitment?"

The people of Ontario are not pleased, and they are mobilizing. Whether it is through this petition, or through phone calls or e-mails that members opposite are getting, I can tell you that this budget bill is a watershed, a very early one for this government.

The Minister of Finance, the other day when he referred to this budget bill, said that it was inspired. Well, I can tell you that it was certainly not inspired by honesty or by integrity. It was apparently inspired by simply a need to cover up for broken promises. It continues to foster the reputation that this Premier established for himself very early, that he cares not about keeping his word. He has no concern about setting an example of strong and decisive leadership. I recall that he said he wanted to be known as the education Premier. I suggest to you that he is very quickly becoming known as the Premier who could not and would not keep his word to the people of Ontario. That will not be forgiven. Whether this government agrees to go forward with a referendum or not, every week, when people across this province cash their paycheque, they will be reminded of the attack of this government on their livelihood. They will be reminded that this Premier and this government were prepared to tell them one thing, to do another, and to bring into this Parliament an illegal budget.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Martel: I know that somewhere in his comments, the member from Oak Ridges was talking about the pledge and the taxpayers federation. I apologize because I was out for a little bit, but I'm sure he did. During the election campaign, I remember seeing that photo of Dalton McGuinty smiling into the camera, signing that pledge with the taxpayers federation that he wasn't going to increase taxes. I said to myself, "That will come back to bite him. That is going to come back to haunt him. What a crazy thing to do."

You know, here we are. You knew even before the election was called, as you looked at the Liberal plan, that the money that they wanted to invest in health care and the money they wanted to invest in education and the money they wanted to invest in kids was money that was going to have to be found by raising taxes. You could not make the kinds of investments that you outlined in your election platform without doing that. The rate of growth in the economy wasn't high enough to allow it. Even if you shut off government advertising, that was a minor portion of the amount of money you were promising for those important investments.

I watched him that day and I said, "It won't be long before Dalton McGuinty is going to be breaking that promise that he made to not raise taxes for Ontarians." You couldn't do what you promised, and you shouldn't have made the promises that you did because you couldn't have kept them.

You can't blame it on the deficit. Do you know why? Mr Phillips, a long-time, esteemed member of this assembly, said last June that there was going to be a $5.6-billion risk, ie deficit. That didn't stop the Liberals from going out and making the promises that they did. So here we are: The ruse is up and the piper has to be paid, but the problem is that the people who are going to pay most of that are low- and modest-income Ontarians.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's indeed a pleasure for me to respond to my friend the member from Oak

Ridges. I've gotten to know the member from Oak Ridges reasonably well. I've served on committee with him and we did a little bit of traveling together. I certainly respect that he's entitled to provide his viewpoint on the budget document.

But it's interesting. In 1995, the Harris government embarked upon the greatest downloading on to municipalities in the history of this province. It devastated the financial capacity of municipalities to deliver the kind of services they want to deliver, and they were forced into significant property tax increases.

Let me tell you, this government, through this budget document, is starting the process of uploading. We're going to give back. We're taking over the financing of public health service. Indeed, every councillor and every mayor across this province has said that's the right thing to do.

The other issue that we're uploading is transit. In October, we'll provide one cent of the gasoline tax that will be dedicated for transit, moving to 1.5 cents a year later. The year after that, in 2006, fully two cents a litre of the gas tax will be dedicated for transit for municipalities right across this province.

Let's talk about nurses. The former Premier of this province stood up in this House and said that nurses were as useless as Hula Hoops. Where was the member for Oak Ridges? I looked in Hansard and there is not one word that he stood up and said, "Mr Premier, you're wrong; nurses are the hub of the health care system in Ontario." Where was he? Nowhere. Zilch on that issue.

What's our plan? We're going to hire 8,000 new nurses. I could keep going—

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Oshawa.

1650

Mr Ouellette: Earlier on I spoke about how Mr Bedford had never been in a political office, didn't know the system at all, was a retired CAW worker wondering how he was going to continue to help out his kids.

I briefly touched on the principal of a local school who is concerned with what is going to happen with his grade 4 class and what is going to happen with that class of 23, the other class of 24 and the possibilities there: Is the opportunity for split classes coming forward? How is that going to impact what takes place? For those who don't know, a split class is essentially where you have half grade 2 so you have 20 kids in grade 2, and half grade 3 so you have 20 kids in grade 3, and you fulfill the needs. The difficulty with a lot of the budgets is the population has to realize that the school boards and the other ministries will take the information and interpret and implement it in the fashion they need.

I know the member from Eglinton-Lawrence spoke about bringing down those silos within the ministry. It sounds great and wonderful, but the reality is you have to get the ministry staff, the bureaucracy and the public at large to understand these things to try and implement them, because if you don't, they won't go anywhere. It may be very interesting, but independent corporations of hospitals and other health care facility systems may not want to get along with each other in the fashion you expect them to. Unless you have some wielding stick to tell them how to go about it and what to do, you may not get the funds spent the way you want.

As I said earlier, it is really the public at large who will look at the way something comes forward, look at the way people take ownership and responsibility for the actions. Do they roll up their sleeves and deal with it or, as a standard military tactic, villainize the enemy and make sure they can move forward on that tactic? I think the public at large realizes there have to be some changes out there, but it is how those changes come about and who is going to be the one to make those changes. Our job is to point this out, and as opposition I certainly hope the government is listening, so they can hear, and when and if changes come about they deal with them in the right way.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Klees: I want to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Peterborough and Oshawa for their comments.

To the member from Nickel Belt: In my debate I was really referring more to the breaking of the law as it relates to the Taxpayer Protection Act, because with regard to the Premier's promises, really no one cares about those any more; everyone knows he can't keep a promise. In fact, it is to the point where it doesn't matter what the government is saying now, whether it is the Minister of Finance or the Premier, all of the promises they make, no one believes a thing they say.

So I want to go beyond that and say, what about the law of Ontario? At least perhaps we can hold him accountable to that. I think what is important is that as we go forward we continue to hear from members opposite about the deficit. A careful consideration of the budget document questions the very integrity of whoever has drafted that document. Just at the flick of a switch, $3.8 billion dollars is taken off that deficit. What is that all about? Very creative bookkeeping. As members have said here today, people in Enron were actually put in jail for doing books like that; it is called cooking them. There is such a problem in this government with honesty and integrity that I would be ashamed to go back to my constituency for this constituency week and try to face anyone there.

I can tell you, say what you will about the time we were in government, there were many times I heard these words: "I may not agree with everything you have done, but I sure respect the fact that you did what you said you were going to do." Those days are a mere memory on the part of people in Ontario, but the day will return—it may have to be three and a half or four years from now—that people will in fact look for honest government again.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Mississauga East.

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): The member for Oak Ridges talks a lot about integrity. The integrity of his party decimated the social services of this province,

disrespected people of all walks of life in this province, be it teachers or nurses or anyone else.

The greatest time I ever have is when I'm with the people. As I canvassed before the election, I knocked on doors and talked about our plan for the future, the plan around better health care. better schools, shorter waiting times and investing in our communities. Those times were the best times. I spoke to so many families, and what they asked for was: "Improve our services. They have killed our hospitals. They have destroyed our schools. They are not managing this province well. They are mismanaging this province."

As ideologues, that party said: "We will stand behind our platform come hell or high water. We'll slash whatever we have to slash. We don't care. We don't care about the destruction we leave behind. As neo-cons, this is our job."

What we did was put together a great platform, a responsible platform, a future-looking platform. As we costed out that platform, we actually made contingencies for $2.2 billion dollars, plus another billion dollars, knowing full well that what was being said by that party did not factor out when we counted up all the numbers. The member from Oak Ridges talks about integrity. They always talked about a balanced budget, which we all knew was not there. There are a number of ways of running this province. The way the former government ran this province was slash and burn.

Let's look at where we are today and contrast and compare. If that party had been elected and then had to address reality, which they weren't addressing or were not being open and honest about with the people of this province and now saw a $6-billion deficit, well, as they speculated often about government, about selling off assets, about slashing services, about fire sales, that government would have further decimated Ontario.

Dollars to doughnuts, we would have had two-tier health care. Dollars to doughnuts, they would have sold the LCBO or other assets if they were to balance the books. That was just not an option. We care too much for the people of this province. Yes, the Premier got in front of this province and he did say to the people, "I will not lower your taxes or raise them either," but the truth was that government was not being truthful with the people of Ontario, that government was hiding deficits everywhere.

Actually, I have the great opportunity to work with the Minister of Health, George Smitherman, and as we opened up the books of the hospitals, which were off the books, we found another $1.5 billion in deficit.

Mr Leal: What was that?

Mr Fonseca: Yes, off the books, with the hospitals. We asked the different hospital CEOs, and they told us that the former Minister of Health, Tony Clement, said, "Hey, go off and just build up your own deficits out there in your hospitals, but it'll keep it off our books." That is not the way to run a government. The way to run a government is being open and honest and transparent. For those watching us today, so that this never happens again, the Provincial Auditor will be reviewing the books six months out of an election, which will be a fixed election date. So we won't, like the previous government, play with election dates: "Should we call it now? Our polls aren't doing too well, so we won't call it now. Let's call it later. The people don't like this in our platform, so we're going to change that and do this and do that." That's not going to happen. Six months out, the people of Ontario will have a clear picture of the books, will know the election date and will be able to make the judgment call on the best person or the best party to vote for.

1700

The member for Nickel Belt also got up. That party, in their platform, was promising everything under the sun; it didn't matter what. Knowing full well they weren't going to get elected as government, they just offered it all; it didn't matter what. There would be blue skies for everybody every day, nobody would have to work, we would be building everything, all social services would be taken care of. This is all so very irresponsible. We have to be open and honest and transparent with the people of this province. That's what they wanted; that's what we gave them.

After Erik Peters looked at the books and found the deficit, we had a consultation with the province and we had town hall meetings. People from all stripes, all parties, came to these meetings. In those meetings we put out what was out there and what we were dealing with. They told us, "Don't sell the LCBO. We don't want to sell the assets." We listened. They said to us, "But yes, we have to take care of our services," and, yes, tough decisions had to be made. Those tough decisions had to be made so we could invest in our hospitals—$2.2 billion more into our hospitals.

As the member for Eglinton-Lawrence said, it's not just about throwing more money into the pot; it's about a transformation of health care. It's about being patient-centred.

I'll give you an example, for all those listening. We're putting 96,000 more available spots for seniors who want to stay on home care. I'll give you the numbers. It costs about $44 a day to keep someone at home on home care, it costs about $140 a day if they are in a long-term-care facility and it costs $800 a day if that senior stays in a hospital. What we're doing is making sure that hospitals prioritize on cardiac care, on cancer care, on hip and knee replacements, and we are putting resources toward that. But we also want hospitals to work in terms of making this health care patient-centred, getting those patients, those seniors and others, back into their homes and back into the workplace in a more efficient manner than we have seen in the past.

We are also investing heavily in prevention, something that wasn't done before. As you know, we are paying for vaccinations like meningitis, chicken pox, pneumonia. That was a paid service where a family with a newborn would have to pay about $600 to get those vaccinations. Today, those will be paid by the government. Why that is so important is that many low-income families would not pay for that prevention because they

couldn't afford it or didn't think it was important enough. Now it's happening.

We also have invested in public health. We are now paying 75% of the public health budget; 50% was previously paid. This will help municipalities—uploading rather than all the Tory downloading that they got for so many years.

We also have made two cents of the gas tax available to public transit. In my own city of Mississauga, we had a post-budget consultation breakfast. The members from Mississauga West and Mississauga Centre were also there. In that post-budget consultation, we brought in all stakeholders, from social services to the Mississauga Board of Trade to the teachers. Small, medium- and large-size businesses were there. The mayor was there.

Mr Leal: What did they say?

Mr Fonseca: What the mayor said was, "This is a great budget in all aspects."

Mr Leal: Which mayor? Who is the mayor?

Mr Fonseca: Mayor Hazel McCallion said, "This is a great budget. It provides the services and the long-term plan for Ontario." She is a visionary. She can see long-term. She has been in her post for 25 years. The people of Mississauga believe in her because she is fiscally prudent but she understands that she has to provide those services.

Mr Speaker, I will be sharing my time right now with the member for Willowdale. It has been a pleasure to speak about this great plan for Ontario.

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): We've heard a lot on this budget debate this afternoon, and I think now, late in the afternoon, it is time to put the whole thing in a bit of historical and contextual perspective.

The Liberals went into this campaign in September on this campaign promise—this was the core of the Liberal platform—fix education, fix the health care system, fix the infrastructure system. The premise of that campaign—there were several premises, but one of the key premises of that campaign was that we had built in a $2-billion expected deficit. That was the premise. Those were the ground rules going into the election.

Post-election, post-October 2, two realities surfaced. The first reality was that it wasn't a $2-billion deficit, it was a $6-billion deficit. That changed the entire equation. The second reality on October 2, or shortly thereafter, was that the health care system, the education system and the infrastructure system were in a whole lot worse shape than anybody thought—than we thought, than the Conservatives thought, than the public thought.

Faced with those two new realities, we had a responsibility. Our responsibility, as the voters told us, was to fix the education system, fix the health care system and fix the infrastructure system. Indeed, that was our promise. That's what the whole campaign was about, to renew those services: health, education and infrastructure. Faced with those new realities, those more dramatic realities, the stark choices were to let the health care, education and infrastructure systems continue to collapse, continue to rot, or fix them.

The new reality, moving from a $2-billion deficit to a $6-billion deficit, required a new look at funding the attempts to repair the health and education systems. We had hard choices to face. The overarching promise to do those repairs required us to make some adjustments along the way about where we were going to find the money to do it.

We made the right choice to raise money through health care premiums, to fix the health care system, to provide us with the ability to fix the education system and the infrastructure system. I say to the members of this House, that was the right choice.

Why was that the right choice? It was the right choice for three reasons: because the citizens of Ontario, the individuals of Ontario, whatever their political stripe, deserve the best health care, the best education and the best access to infrastructure.

1710

This budget is different than the budgets of the previous government because this budget is not a budget for this year and for the coming year; it is a budget, a business plan, an approach, spread over four years to fix health, education and infrastructure. It is not a quick fix spread over one year. We have a detailed plan. It's set out in the budget. It's a plan covering four years and, indeed, reaching beyond that. More than just a four-year plan, we have a time frame and we have measurable targets built into that budget spread over the four-year plan.

In short, it's not just a one-year budget; it's a four-year plan with time frames built into it and, most importantly, it's a four-year plan with targeted results built into it. At the end of the four-year period, the citizens of Ontario, whatever their political stripe, can review the plan, can look at the targets we set, can look at the measures we've set to satisfy ourselves that we've met that target, and at the end of the four-year plan, the citizens of Ontario will reflect back. They will match the measures to the targets of the four-year plan.

Some of those measures we're going to look at, not next month and not in six months but throughout the course of the plan: Have we reduced hospital waiting lists? I'm confident that the answer to that will be yes, that we will have achieved what we set out to do in the four-year budget plan.

Another target, another goal we've set to measure whether we've completed what we said we were going to do in the four-year plan is literacy rates. Four years down the road, the citizens of Ontario are going to look at the literacy rates of our elementary school and high schooi graduates and they're going to say, "Yes, that Liberal government committed resources to education, they set targets, they set measurable goals and they have met them."

There are also goals, targets and measurable tests set for our approaches to repairing the infrastructure system. This is a very substantial plan. It is a long-term plan and it's a plan that has targeted and measurable results in it. It is a plan to repair this province, to repair health care, to repair education, to repair infrastructure.

Let me share with you and the members of this House some of the expectations we're going to meet over the next four years. I think when you reflect on the detail of these targets, these goals in health and education, you'll join with me in supporting this budget: short wait times for cancer patients; nine new MRI and CT scan sites; 9,000 additional cataract surgeries; 36,000 additional cardiac services; 2,300 additional joint replacements. That is a target. We're going to meet that target.

There are $11.3 billion in operating supports for hospitals over the next year; $600 million this year to support primary care in Ontario; community health centres, an additional $14 million over the next year; double the number of opportunities for international medical graduates, to provide doctors for the people of Ontario; 12,000 bed lifts for hospitals and long-term-care facilities; adding chickenpox, smallpox, meningitis and pneumonia vaccinations—$600 per child per year. That almost covers the health care premium increase.

On the education front: per student funding, $2.1 billion, or a per student increase of $1,100; increasing the target from 50% to 75% for students meeting provincial standards for the three Rs—reading, writing and arithmetic; another 1,000 training spaces for additional teachers; 4,000 new specialist teachers to assist with the three Rs.

These are but a few of the measurable targets, the measurable goals that are built into this budget, this four-year plan. This is a budget that deserves everyone's support.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I appreciate the comments from the two members on their budget. Obviously, they have to take a side. Obviously, as members of the Liberal Party, you have to support this catastrophe. This is a disaster. You all know it. I could see it in your eyes the other day as you looked across the room. There was a sick feeling in people's faces as they looked at Mr Sorbara breaking one promise after another. Unfortunately, this is a fact of life. It's a result of broken promises, which is your government's legacy.

You came into power on October 2, you demonized the former government for seven months, you floated around a bunch of trial balloons, you floundered in the sea, making no decisions, and you came out with a budget that was pathetic. It has hit taxpayers at an enormous rate. They're very, very disappointed. Surely you see that. You're going to hear it during constituency week, that's for sure. I haven't seen one positive thing about this budget.

I know you have to support it and you have to try to continue to demonize our government. But guys, enjoy your first term here because many of you will only have one term. I'm telling you, this is a bad budget and there are a lot of really, really unhappy people in Ontario right now listening to our comments today. They found out about your budget. They found out about the tax increases, the broken promises, and they are very, very disappointed.

This is a budget that will cause jobs to be lost to the citizens of our province. It's taking money out of the working man's pockets. I appreciate that you guys have to support it and that's your position, but it's unfortunate that this is where we're going.

Ms Martel: I had to laugh when I heard the member for Mississauga East say that the election platform of the Liberals was responsible, because nothing was further from the truth. He tried to say that the former government hid the deficit and they knew nothing about that, and there was their Liberal finance critic last June, down in the estimates committee, saying to Janet Ecker, "You have a $5.6-billion problem." The Liberals knew that they had a $5.6-billion problem long before the election. It didn't stop them from making 231 promises, and it didn't stop them from not putting any contingency plan whatsoever into their election platform to take that into account—nothing. There was Dalton McGuinty during the election, smiling into the camera saying, "No tax increases." Well, of course there were going to be tax increases, for goodness' sake; how else was the government going to pay for the investments they were making, especially in light of a $5.6-billion deficit that they knew about before they went and made the promises?

You know what? In our election platform, we were honest with Ontarians, which is more than I can say for you folks, because we did tell people that we were going to raise taxes. We said that for those people who got the 35% tax decrease, we were going to cancel that. Not only that; we were going to put a surtax on those people who made $100,000 and on income of $150,000, so that we could raise $1.6 billion to invest in education. We told people we were going to return to the 1999 corporate tax rates, so those companies that have been getting off scot-free under the Conservatives were going to pay their fair share again. We told people that we would close the loopholes in the employer health tax so that big corporations that were getting that exemption when they shouldn't be were going to have that shut down. We were going to raise $700 million that way.

Those are the choices you could have made too in this budget, but you didn't make those choices. Instead, you're going to raise $3 billion off the backs of modest- and low-income families. That's not hard to do: Kick those people in the teeth one more time. You should have taken on those who are wealthy, and wealthy corporations.

1720

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I wanted just to focus for a moment on health care, seeing as it seems to be the major thrust, the major focus of this particular budget. To do that, I'd like to open by quoting a former Prime Minister of England, Mr Benjamin Disraeli, who wrote, "The health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a state depend."

Just in the brief time I have, I thought I might add comments not only as the MPP from Etobicoke North but also as a physician. For example, regarding cardiac care

or cancer or joint replacement—the major thrust of this particular budget—typically what might happen? A 45-year-old individual comes to our office diagnosed with chest pain, and maybe we determine through our various procedures and diagnostic testing that they need to have a heart operation. We know, as physicians, with the state of health care previously that individual might have had to wait, for example, two, three, four or six months, even longer, for very important, critical surgery. There was a long and, unfortunately, growing list of individuals who had actually passed away, died, had major heart attacks before they actually came to that surgery. That's a real tragedy.

Similarly, for example, in cancer care, cancer is a particular disease where time is of the essence. We want to diagnose early. We want to bring the individuals to treatment early. In fact, if the cancer decides to leave home, spread around the body from its original site, then it's essentially a much more difficult problem and often a terminal illness.

It's for these types of reasons, through our consultations with the people of Ontario, that we in the government have moved very forcefully to address all these various issues, whether it's immunization, cardiac care, cancer care or joint replacement.

The Speaker: The member for Mississauga East.

Mr Fonseca: I'd like to thank the members for Simcoe North, Willowdale, Etobicoke North and Nickel Belt for their comments.

This budget plan is a plan that will take us into a prosperous future. It's a plan that invests in health care, education and infrastructure. We know that if we want quality of life, if we want Ontario to be the best place to live and work, we have to invest in these things. We have to invest in our environment. We hired more water inspectors. We are taking care of our environment. We have made inroads to work with other jurisdictions that border us to improve our environment.

We want to keep our health care system second to none. Having a great health care system, which this budget allows for, allows companies to come to Ontario, to invest in Ontario because they want a strong health care system for their employees.

Also, investing in our education system: Companies have told us that without a knowledge-based workforce, they will not be coming to Ontario; they will not grow in Ontario. We realized this, so we are investing heavily in education through all levels, through secondary schools, through elementary schools with a cap of 20 students up to grade 3. We froze tuition in this budget.

We are looking after all aspects of life here in Ontario. I am very proud of this budget, of this plan, and the people of Ontario will prosper under it.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Dunlop: Before we get into the budget debate—because we're going to hear a lot of comments over the next few days—I did want to point out that I wasn't in the House earlier this afternoon because a group of us were out at Cobourg. I just wanted to pay sort of the last respects today to Constable Chris Garrett and the Cobourg police department and his family. The Premier was there, along with Mr Kwinter, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, our leader Ernie Eves and myself, along with Peter Kormos. I must say it was a funeral that—I've never seen anything like it before. There were literally thousands and thousands of police officers from all across North America.

You know, there are times in this House when we're very negative about each other, but the fact of the matter is, today you would be proud to be an Ontarian. It was really and truly something, how we honoured Constable Garrett and how we paid respect to him and his family. I just want to put that on the record, because I think it's so important on days like this. I know everybody would have liked to be in the House today to listen to question period, and I think even the Premier would have liked that, but I give him credit for being out in Cobourg, along with all the other folks I mentioned and literally thousands of police officers from across our province, across our country and across North America.

With that, I'll slip into the budget speech now.

I guess I look back to 1995. Your government has basically had one crutch to go back on, and that's this $5.8-billion-and-growing deficit that you keep talking about. One thing you fail to mention with the deficit that may have accumulated until October of last year was the type of year we had. That, of course, was highlighted by SARS, by the blackout, by West Nile, by mad cow disease, costing the province literally hundreds of millions of dollars, and even up into the billions of dollars. We know that the federal government did not come through for our government. We expected $1 billion. Eventually, I believe, Mr McGuinty signed off on about $330 million.

Whatever deficit there was last year—obviously there is some kind of a debt, and I'm not arguing about that—it's actually very minor in comparison to what we inherited in 1995, and that was a debt of close to $12 billion. In 1995, we'd also had a tremendous loss of jobs over a depression that hit not only Ontario and Canada, but most of North America and right around the world. So to begin with, in 1995, we went to work with a plan immediately. That was the beginning of the creation of over a million jobs in the province. It was also the beginning of some of our changes to the welfare rules and the revamping of the welfare system. About 620,000 people left the welfare rolls.

I think it's important that we compare the two governments through the two positions they began with: you and your government in 2003, and our government in 1995. We're very, very proud of the accomplishments of the Harris-Eves governments in that period: the one million new jobs, the strong, strong economy and a lot of confidence. But the thing we're most proud of is the fact that we kept our promises. That was the standard people went by. As Mr Klees and Mr Ouellette said earlier, the one thing that was so important to the citizens of the province of Ontario—they'd often say, "Look, I didn't

even vote for you. I didn't vote for Mike Harris, but you know, the guy kept his word. He started out and he said what he was going to do." That's what happens, and that's why we just cannot believe what's happened in the last seven months when we see some of the comments that are coming out of the new government.

One of the things that has really disturbed me this last couple of days is Paul Martin, the guy who's supposed to be—I think he's the Prime Minister. There hasn't been a recall or anything like that, has there? But Paul Martin wandered into this the other day, criticizing the Harris-Eves government. If there's anybody in North America who can be concerned about health care and the concerns around health care funding, it's Paul Martin. His hands are on every hospital in this country. I heard one of the members earlier talk about the deficits hospitals may have. You know what? I call any deficit that hospitals have a Paul Martin deficit. Every hospital in our country has a deficit, and it's because of the lack of funding. I can blame it all on Paul Martin because his hands are on it all.

1730

First of all, that is how he originally balanced the budget of the Canadian government: on the backs of the hospitals and on the health care system. It's as simple as that. We all know that. He cut billions of dollars out of it as the Minister of Finance. Now he wants to be the Prime Minister.

He's forgetting all about things like the sponsorship scandal and his involvement with CSL, what kind of tenders that company received from the federal government. Now he's like a brand new, clean guy out there. He's pretending nothing ever happened. Paul Martin should say nothing about any budget, because his hands are on every provincial and federal budget that you'd ever imagine in our country today.

This is the guy who will likely be calling an election, maybe even this weekend, I understand. I'm hoping he does, because I think he's going to wear some of Mr McGuinty's budget. Of course, that's why he was cutting up and had concerns with Mr Harris and Mr Eves yesterday.

I'd like to talk about Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal Party's promises. I go back—and I think this is the ad you're going to hear about. I shouldn't repeat it over and over again, but the one thing that Dalton McGuinty said on the TV ads was, "I will not raise your taxes." I'll tell you, you're going to see the media play that over and over again. You're going to hear it mentioned in this House thousands of times between now and the next election.

It will probably be an ad that will be run by, maybe, the New Democratic Party or, maybe, the Progressive Conservative Party, saying, "'I will not raise your taxes.' Remember that ad?" and then they'll refer back to all these budgets and all these disasters and broken promises you've had since then.

But do you know what? What is really something is when the guy went out on, I believe it was September 11, and signed the Taxpayer Protection Act. It was a pledge not to continue deficits, it was a pledge to hold referendums and it was a pledge not to raise taxes. Of course, we all know what's happened. Now I understand he doesn't want to do a referendum. Why would you not want to hold a referendum? Would you be afraid that what happened in Hamilton East would happen right across the province?

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Did you hold a referendum when you broke the law?

Mr Dunlop: We didn't break the law. Mr Speaker, he's trying to say that our government broke the law. We didn't break the law. We never broke the law. You are breaking the law with this budget. It's plain and simple. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is saying this; all kinds of stakeholder groups throughout our province are saying this. Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal Party of Ontario are breaking the law with this budget. It's as plain and simple as that. That's why we think you should hold a referendum.

I also have to tell you that since budget day—I guess you people are hearing all kinds of positive things about the budget, what you're saying here today—we're hearing nothing positive. We've heard nothing positive, especially with the delisting of the services.

The premium is one thing. That's just a plain tax grab, but the delisting of the services has many people upset. I had a lady in the constituency office the other day. She talked about her daughter who has cerebral palsy. She has to have physiotherapy twice a week. This will no longer be covered.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: She's under the impression that it won't be covered. She does not have the money to pay that. I'm telling you—

Interjection: Is she on ODSP?

Mr Dunlop: No. She does not have the money to pay for physiotherapy for her little girl.

I had another mother yesterday, a mother of three. She earns $24,000 a year. She can't afford the $300 a year. She does not have $25 a month extra to give Dalton McGuinty for the health care premium. She does not have it. Under $20,000 she wouldn't pay anything, but now she's going to have to pay $300. She is concerned. She was crying in my office. Maybe you're saying there's some magical way around this, but the people I have been hearing from over the last few days are very concerned about this.

I would like to talk a little bit about education. I understand you're going to increase education by $2.1 billion over four years. If I'm wrong on that, please heckle and tell me, but that's my understanding. I have to tell you that in the last five years, since I've been here, education has increased by over $2.1 billion. It has been an average of about $800 million a year. I am concerned, because already I have seen newspaper articles from our local school boards and they're not happy. They think it's

a drop in the bucket. They're not happy with the $500 million you folks want to put into it.

Mr Leal: Only in Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: Well, I can tell you, you can heckle me all you want on the other side, but people aren't happy with the $500 million a year. As time goes on and you roll out the grant regulations, which I expect and hope we will see fairly soon, possibly right after constituency week—we need to see those figures to see just what our school boards are getting. But I can tell you the Simcoe County District School Board in my region has received substantial increases in education funding over the last five years, since I've been here anyway, and they never seem to be very happy with the funding they get. So I'm not 100% sure they will be happy this year either.

There are a couple things I wanted to kind of take credit for in your budget. There are two things. Last Friday night, I was honoured to receive an award from the Ontario Council for Technology Education. It's for a report I did in 2002 for Minister Ecker. We visited a lot of schools across the province and put together a report. One of the things it recommended was the apprenticeship tax credit, which I see you are proposing. We proposed it as well in our platform.

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: No, we put all kinds of tax credits through. The apprenticeship tax credit was an idea I personally spent a lot of time on with Mrs Ecker and Mr Eves and they agreed to do it.

The other thing is I understand that in your budget there is $20 million going into technological education equipment. We had made that announcement for, I believe it was, $110 million over four years.

One of the reasons I got the award last week—there were people from the Ministry of Education at the Nottawasaga Inn and I talked to a lot of classroom teachers as well—is they received the first $8 million dollars of the lump sum of money back in September 2003, just about the time the election was being called. They are very happy with it.

If there is anything positive in the education portion of the budget, it would have to be continuing on with my program and making sure money goes into technological education.

Mr Leal: So you're voting for it?

Mr Dunlop: I will vote for that portion of it.

The only other thing I would agree with: I believe there is $25 million in the budget for children's treatment centres, and I believe North Bay and the county of York-Simcoe are the only two regions of the province that don't have a children's treatment centre. I can tell you right now, and I will tell Minister Smitherman and anybody here who is his PA—I believe Dr Qaadri is—that we will be lobbying quite a bit over the next couple years for a children's treatment centre for York-Simcoe. We believe it's important. So the children's treatment centres, you've put the money in there—as long as it goes to Simcoe North and of course the things I talked about with the apprenticeship.

1740

Let's talk about policing. You promised 1,000 new police officers, and there's nothing in there for the police. Not one police officer is mentioned in this document.

When I think of the issues the police are facing today, such as the grow operations; the monitoring—you guys have been flopping around on that $700,000 announcement for monitoring of pedophiles; the gang-related crimes. More police are required. You've just got to get more money in for police. If you go back to your cabinet ministers and do anything, please lobby for more police officers, because sometimes the media will look at one police department, and if there are a few bad apples they'll demonize the whole force.

Today, when I went out to the funeral of Constable Garrett, I witnessed a fantastic group of people. You might have heard Don Cherry last night talking on the Calgary hockey game. Between periods, he made a statement on his support of the police. I think it's so important that we not forget law and order and public safety in our communities.

We're disappointed there's nothing in there for police. As corrections critic, I was hoping to take credit for 250 police officers this year in the budget, because I've been asking Mr Kwinter quite a bit since we got elected about having more police. So I'd like to see that happen.

The other thing I'd like to talk about a little bit is one of your broken promises. I'm sure Ms Martel or the NDP will get to this, but the autism promise was not a good idea. Mr McGuinty promised IBI treatment for those over the age of six. Nothing was in the budget for them. I understand the problems. I understand how huge the treatment of autism is, but you can't go out and promise people things—and I lost people to your campaigns because they thought they were getting autism treatment for one child—a good friend of mine, too. There's nothing there for them, and they're disappointed. A lot of people are disappointed with that. That's a mistake you made by making that promise.

You talked about the environment. I don't really see a lot of money in the budget for the environment. I know it's a difficult one, but I'm very concerned, because I've been harping on about the site 41 issue in my riding. It's a huge problem. I know the minister has a job to do. She has a huge staff of people in the ministry whom she takes advice from. I think we are going down the wrong road with the way landfills are right now, especially when we try to compare them to what we had in the past and bring in Justice O'Connor's recommendations from the Walkerton inquiry.

There are big problems with our landfills, and I can't see how we can continue on that path. I've been after the minister to put a moratorium on this one landfill, but maybe there are others. I'm only learning more about the one landfill in Simcoe county. There may be others across the province in the same position, and maybe her hands are tied on it. But the fact of the matter is, as we try to implement nutrient management and all the

recommendations of the Walkerton inquiry, I think we're on the wrong path.

Again we go back to taxpayer protection. I know we're getting short of time here, but I have to tell you that we thought that, when Mr McGuinty signed the Taxpayer Protection Act, he did it with the good of the citizens of Ontario in mind. It would have been easy for any one of our parties to go out and promise the world to everybody. We could have said, "Yes, we're going to give you that." But it wasn't our way. We made promises and we kept our promises. You folks made a lot of promises that you haven't kept. I'm afraid you are going to be branded with that. You're going to hear a lot about it over the next three, four or five days in question period as we move toward the spring break, maybe—no, spring break's next week—as we move toward the summer break after the spring break.

Mr Qaadri: We're working in our constituency offices.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, well, we're all working that week, but we don't have to be here; that's one thing.

I appreciate the comments today on the budget that Mr Sorbara presented. I look forward to comments and questions, and more comments in the future on it as well.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Prue: It is always a pleasure to comment upon the speeches of my friend from Simcoe North. He said a great many things, and two minutes will only allow me to comment on a couple of them.

First, he had to talk about the Balanced Budget Act and how this government is not following the Balanced Budget Act. I have to remind him his government did not follow the Balanced Budget Act either. In fact, I'm here to tell all my friends opposite that the Balanced Budget Act is bad law. You should never have voted for it in the first place and if you have an opportunity to put in a better law, please do so. We in the New Democratic Party recognize it is bad law and there is no sense chasing after it or trying to do what you are going to do.

Second, he talked about the referendum. With all respect, I don't expect you to go to a referendum, any more than I expect the Tories to ever go to a referendum. When the people of Toronto voted massively against the megacity in a referendum, they refused to recognize it.

Applause.

Mr Prue: Don't clap too loud, because when the people of Kawartha Lakes went with a ministerial question in a referendum, you won't recognize that either. There is no sense fooling the people that a referendum is some kind of answer, because no matter how they vote on the referendum, governments don't have the sort of wherewithal to actually follow what the people want. The only time they follow what the people want is in an election period when they get elected.

The reality of all this and the reason all this debate is taking place is that the Tories in their last term in office were very poor fiscal managers. In the end, they hid $5.6 billion.

I have to say, the Liberals have had choices which I don't think you have followed well enough. You had choices, but I think you have chosen the wrong ones. The reason you chose the wrong ones is that you too are hamstrung because you made a silly promise to the taxpayers' alliance. You made that promise and you should not have. But please, do something better than the way you are taxing now.

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I listened with great interest to the comments of my friend from Simcoe North. I realize that he is in the opposition and his role is to criticize the government, but, quite frankly, it is starting to get a bit tiring. We have the Conservatives who stand up and tell us about how they had a plan in 1995, and he went into it in some detail. Let's talk about their plan. Their plan was going against the most vulnerable, attacking them, slashing welfare rates, attacking hospitals and educational institutions. Their plan was about downloading services to municipalities, without any money to follow. That was their plan. That is the last time we had a government in Ontario that faced a fiscal mess like the one we're facing.

What have we done? We've come in with a four-year plan which builds on education and health care and starts to restore the most vulnerable. That is a plan that the people of Ontario will see unfold over the next four years and that's a plan that they'll support.

I ask the Progressive Conservatives, where is their plan? All they do is criticize, criticize, criticize. I have to give my friend credit because he did actually stand up and admit that there were some good things in the budget, like the apprenticeship program, like technological equipment and money for children's treatment centres. I ask him, with a $5.6-billion deficit, where are we supposed to get that money? We had to make hard decisions, but we made those decisions because we have a four-year plan.

Do you know what your answer would have been? Your answer and the one I hear from Mr Baird, the member for Nepean-Carleton, is, if the Conservatives had been in, "Don't worry. We would have had a balanced budget because we would have slashed billions and billions of dollars," from the same sorts of services that you just stood in the House and praised. It's time that this opposition started to put forward a positive plan.

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I am going to join my colleague in terms of praising the budget because I want you to know that I received an e-mail today from Deirdre Finlay, and if I may read it to you, she says:

"Congratulations to you and your colleagues on your bold and principled leadership in Tuesday's budget initiatives. Many thanks for your assistance to children's mental health. We know that there are many compelling needs in our community and we appreciated your accessibility to allow us to help the children who need it the most. We value not only your government's short-term response to our immediate issues, but also its thoughtful approach to the longer-term challenges of

creating a sustainable, effective and integrated system that works for children and their families."

As I said, this lady is Deirdre Finlay. She is the executive director of the Charlton Hall Child and Family Centre in Hamilton.

Very often in this House we hear criticism from many different corners, but it's so nice that once in a while we hear from someone who is appreciative of the hard work and dedication it takes to make principled leadership decisions. With a budget, where you have so many very vulnerable people who need our help, making tough decisions requires a certain amount of strength of character, which I believe was demonstrated by Mr McGuinty and Mr Sorbara in their approach to the very difficult decision-making in this budget.

They were able to take a look at some of the needs of Ontario and make the decisions as required to help those most in need of help, the most vulnerable in our community who require the support we in this House hope to achieve over time.

1750

Mr Delaney: Let me take a brief moment to address some remarks made earlier this afternoon by the member for Oak Ridges. First of all, I thank him for his kind remarks on my maiden speech. I know the member from Oak Ridges to be someone of character and commitment, and it will be a challenge and a privilege to disagree passionately with him. To respond to a challenge he laid before me, I stand in this House and say to the people of Ontario that their government's budget and plan for their future is good for the people of Ontario.

Let me address just one point in the budget. Our schools and hospital boards have said to us repeatedly, "Please don't ask us to make multi-year plans when you only give us one-year funding and when we only get that one-year funding about two thirds of the way through the budget cycle." In this budget one of the commitments made by the Minister of Finance to school boards and hospital boards across Ontario is that you can see what we have laid out for four years. This means that when you're asked to plan multi-year, you're going to get the resources to be able to know in the future exactly what you are going to have to work with. I think that's an important step forward.

If nothing else, that was one of the reasons I received a telephone call yesterday from the president of the Credit Valley Hospital, Wayne Fyffe, who said, "Congratulations on your budget. This is one of the steps it will take to ensure universality of health care in Ontario."

As has previously been mentioned, in Mississauga we held a budget breakfast the day after the budget. Among the people who came to say, "The budget is good for the city of Mississauga," was our mayor, Hazel McCallion. Our social services provider said, "The budget is good for the province of Ontario," and our business people say, "The budget is good for the province of Ontario."

The Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes.

Mr Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Beaches-East York, Kitchener Centre, Hamilton West and Mississauga West for their comments. I could go on for quite a while here, but one of the problems we have is with some of the timings. We've seen some timings that you've done recently. One of the things was your Hamilton by-election. It's amazing you had it last week. You only got 26% of the vote, but I wonder what you would have got if it had been held tomorrow.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: I wonder, Michael, what it would have been. It would have been amazing.

Second, you held it two days before constituency week, so you're hoping it will die down. That's what's happening.

The other thing you're hoping will happen is that Mr Martin, our gangster from Ottawa, will call an election.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Something in your face tells me you said something unparliamentary.

Mr Dunlop: I withdraw that. I can think of a lot better words than that.

Let me just read something. People are reading sentences here. This is from the Ottawa Citizen—you have a lot of seats in Ottawa—"One need look no further than the McGuinty government to explain the crisis in Canadian democracy: voter cynicism and apathy. The government's ... "—I can't use this word—"and failures have made politics into a game in which voters are treated as idiots.

"As the first step in rehabilitation, our democracy urgently needs a recall mechanism that would remove from office people who engage in the scale of deception we have just witnessed from Mr McGuinty and his associates."

I think that letter says it all. That's what we are hearing across the province. We think this budget is bad news for the citizens of Ontario. We think it's a step back at least 15 to 20 years. We will not under any circumstances support this budget unless you agree to a referendum, and I know you—

The Speaker: Thank you. The Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): Mr Speaker, His Honour awaits.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario entered the chamber of the Legislative Assembly and took his seat upon the throne.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

Hon James K. Bartleman (Lieutenant Governor): Pray be seated.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly of the province has, at its present meetings thereof, passed certain bills to which, in the name of and on behalf of the said

Legislative Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

Deputy Clerk (Ms Deborah Deller): The following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed:

Bill 31, An Act to enact and amend various Acts with respect to the protection of health information / Projet de loi 31, Loi édictant et modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait à la protection des renseignements sur la santé.

Bill 68, An Act to amend the repeal date of the Edible Oil Products Act / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant la date d'abrogation de la Loi sur les produits oléagineux comestibles.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): In Her Majesty's name, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

Au nom de Sa Majesté, Son Honneur le lieutenant-gouverneur sanctionne ces projets de loi.

His Honour was then pleased to retire.

The Speaker: It being past 6 of the clock, the House stands adjourned until Monday, May 31.

The House adjourned at 1803.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Alvin Curling
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Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
Nepean-Carleton	Baird, John R. (PC)
Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Niagara Falls	Craitor, Kim (L)
Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)
Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)
Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)
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Scarborough-Rouge River	**Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin** (L) Speaker / Président
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)
Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)
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Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
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Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	**Pupatello, Hon / L'hon Sandra** (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Windsor-St Clair	**Duncan, Hon / L'hon Dwight** (L) Minister of Energy, Chair of Cabinet, Government House Leader / ministre de l'Énergie, président du Conseil des ministres, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
York Centre / York-Centre	**Kwinter, Hon / L'hon Monte** (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
York South-Weston / York-Sud–Weston	**Cordiano, Hon / L'hon Joseph** (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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Rosario Marchese, Jerry Martiniuk,
Phil McNeely, Bill Murdoch,
Khalil Ramal, Tony Ruprecht,
Maria Van Bommel, Tony C.Wong
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 38e législature

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Monday 31 May 2004

Lundi 31 mai 2004

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 31 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 31 mai 2004

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER FOR HAMILTON EAST

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the Chief Election Officer and laid upon the table a certificate of the by-election in the electoral district of Hamilton East.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): I have a letter addressed to:

"Mr Claude L. DesRosiers
"Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
"Room 104
"Legislative Building
"Queen's Park
"Toronto, Ontario
"M7A 1A2."

It reads as follows:

"Dear Mr DesRosiers:

"A writ of election dated the 14th day of April, 2004, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to E. Joyce Newman, returning officer for the electoral district of Hamilton East, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Hamilton East in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Dominic Agostino, who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Hamilton East, hath departed this life. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Hamilton East on the 13th day of May, 2004, Andrea Horwath has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 21st day of May, 2004, which is now lodged of record in my office.

"John L. Hollins
"Chief Election Officer
"Toronto, May 25, 2004."

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and the House Andrea Horwath, member-elect for the electoral district of Hamilton East, who has taken the oath, signed the roll, and now claims the right to take her seat.

The Speaker: Let the honourable member take her seat.

REQUEST TO INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a request by the member for Whitby-Ajax to the Honourable Coulter A. Osborne, Integrity Commissioner, for an opinion pursuant to subsection 30(1) of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the Honourable Gregory Sorbara, Minister of Finance, in his responsibility for the budget and budget secrecy, has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention.

CONDUCT OF HOUSE PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I want to inform the House, that due to the change in the membership of the House following the by-election in Hamilton East, December 16, 2003, recommendation to the Speaker on how to conduct the proceedings of the House will no longer apply. Specifically, since the nine members' statements are allocated in proportion to the number of private members of each recognized party, I want to advise that the members of the government will be entitled to five members' statements, the official opposition will be entitled to three members' statements and the New Democratic caucus will be entitled to one member's statement each day.

As well, the oral questions will be conducted according to the April 28, 1986, recommendation to the Speaker, as follows.

The official opposition will be entitled to a leadoff question with two supplementary questions, and a second leadoff question with another two supplementary questions.

The third party will then be entitled to a leadoff question with two supplementary questions, and a second lead-off question with another two supplementary questions.

Questioning will then proceed with one question and one supplementary question, on the rotation of official opposition, the third party and the government, to the conclusion of oral questions.

As a recognized party, the New Democratic caucus also has certain entitlements as set out in the standing orders, and these too will be observed from this point.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HEALTH CARE

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Last week was constituency week, and as a result I had the opportunity

to speak to a great number of people in my riding. I have to say that people were very clear about how they felt in regard to the recent provincial budget. My constituency office was inundated with walk-in traffic, protest letters and phone calls by people who couldn't believe that this government is asking them to pay more for less service in health care. Then, last Wednesday, I attended a rally in my riding about delisting OHIP services. I have to say my riding is not the type that holds rallies, but they think health care is the most important service the government controls.

That's why I'm shocked that this government would attack it the way they have, and the people in my riding are shocked too. They're shocked that the government would think they'd accept taking away needed services, and yet ask for more money. They're shocked the government made the decision that physiotherapy, chiropractic services and eye examinations were not considered essential services. And they're shocked that the government didn't think about how the delisting of essential health care services would affect the daily lives of real people like them before they grabbed the money. The people of my riding are shocked that the government that constantly spouts rhetoric on preventive, not crisis, health care would now make it harder, if not impossible, for people to access the services; that the government that promised not to raise taxes so blatantly raises taxes, and it has made them very angry.

If this is how I experienced constituency week, I wonder how it went for my colleagues across the floor.

1340

BY-ELECTION IN HAMILTON EAST

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm pleased to rise today to deliver my first member's statement as MPP for Hamilton East. I want to begin by thanking the voters of Hamilton East. The extensive support I received on May 13 was very humbling and overwhelming. Residents of my riding spoke loudly and clearly, and I look forward to bringing their concerns to this Legislature at every opportunity.

Who are these Hamiltonians? They are women and men from every walk of life and from every ethnocultural background and every political stripe. They are people who shared with me their concerns about the direction in which this province is headed. They are worried about their standard of living and their ability to make ends meet. I'll be speaking out on their behalf with great passion and commitment.

I want to thank the hundreds of volunteers and workers who helped on my campaign. The thousands of hours you contributed brought us to victory. The efforts of each individual are very much appreciated. I see in the gallery some of my friends from the South Asian community of Hamilton East who have taken the time to join me today. I want to thank you for your support and confidence and I look forward to our growing friendship.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my partner, Ben, and my son, Julian. You have encouraged me and believed in me unconditionally. You are my touchstones and my equilibrium. To my family and friends, amongst whom I count several members of city council, my former colleagues, my thanks and gratitude for all your support, advice and confidence.

In closing, I believe it's fitting to pay my respects to the former MPP Dominic Agostino, who represented the constituents of Hamilton East with passion and vigour. His passing was a terrible loss for the city of Hamilton and this Legislature. Dominic was a champion of the people and a fighter for justice. I look forward to carrying on that tradition for the people of Hamilton East.

EVENTS IN GLENGARRY-PRESCOTT-RUSSELL
ÉVÉNEMENTS À GLENGARRY-PRESCOTT-RUSSELL

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): The tourist season is just around the corner. Glengarry-Prescott-Russell is the eastern gateway to Ontario. Please allow me to share five major events that will take place in the beautiful riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell.

Premièrement, L'écho d'un peuple de Francoscénie, est un spectacle avec plus de mille personnages, qui portera sur quatre siècles d'histoire française en Amérique du Nord et en Ontario.

Francoscénie prévoit donner 28 spectacles à l'été 2004, dans un théâtre en plein air à la Ferme Centenaire Drouin, à partir du 26 juin.

Furthermore, I'm proud to share with my colleagues that three of the most important festivals in my riding have joined forces to become one single event. Le festival de la curd de St-Albert, le festival Country Western d'Alfred et le festival Country Music de Wendover seront dorénavant connus sous la bannière « Commune de destination festivals—porte d'entrée de l'est ». Ces trois festivals se tiendront dès le 8 juillet.

The Glengarry Highland Games, which were first held in 1948, have since welcomed close to a million visitors from around the world who are drawn to Maxville to witness one of the largest Highland games in the world.

This year's games will take place July 30 and 31. I encourage everyone who wishes to visit the beautiful and unique riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell to contact my office for more information on these wonderful events.

EVENTS IN DURHAM

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'd like to share with the House some of the events of my riding over the past week. Saturday, May 29, I was pleased to attend the sod turning of the new secondary school in Bowmanville. Staff, students, parents and, indeed, the entire community look forward to the completion of this new high school. It is the latest in approximately 20 new schools or major

renovations in my riding over the past decade. However, educators in Durham riding have concerns over the benchmark funding formula issue, and I will be bringing that to the attention of the Minister of Education.

Saturday was also the annual Kids' Fishing Day, co-hosted with my colleague Gerry Ouellette, MPP for Oshawa. This event gives youth in our riding of Durham a chance to enjoy the great outdoors and learn more about Ontario's natural resources and environment.

Finally, I'd like to mention the official opening of the new baseball diamond, along with playing fields and trails, at Cartwright Fields in Nestleton. This is the culmination of several years of hard work by Cartwright Sports and Recreation and many community volunteers. Funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 2001 provided $75,000 toward the project, with assistance also provided by the township of Scugog and many local fundraisers.

I'd like to congratulate Wilma Wotten, president of Cartwright Fields, as well as the original board members: Dave Frew, Colin Kemp, Patti Alpe, Garry Beechy, Dave Dietlein, Fred Ford and Ingrid Larmer. Congratulations also to the more recent board members, including Terry Stephenson, Nancy Stinson, Diane Grieve, Scott Heard and Tye Parent.

In my riding, I also heard concerns wherever I went about the new health tax, the cost of insurance, and the cost of electricity. The constituents of Durham need to be listened to.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): It gives me great pleasure to rise and pay tribute today to members of my community who are working to increase the safety of Ontario's roads through the creation of a drunk driving prevention tool called the Matrix driving simulator. The simulator illustrates the effects of alcohol behind the wheel in a safe environment. It literally allows students to see what it is like to operate a motor vehicle while impaired by having them wear special goggles which simulate the visual experience of someone who has been drinking.

The Matrix is the first interactive prevention tool of its kind in the province and it is available to local schools throughout the Waterloo region through the police's high school liaison program.

This fusion of technology was made possible through community partnerships consisting of Ray Tanguay, the president; Greg Mordu, general manager of Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada; Staff Sergeant Scott Diefenbaker from the Waterloo Regional Police Service; Tim Funk and Randy Dyke from Elmira District Secondary School; Louis Chong, University of Waterloo; Steve Harper, Edcom Multimedia; the region of Waterloo Community Health Department; and Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

I had the pleasure of recently welcoming the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to the region for a demonstration of this simulator, and I am sure he will agree that it is an excellent example of how a community can work together to improve road safety in our province. I'm certain that all members of this Legislature join me today in congratulating all those involved with this worthwhile project, which will undoubtedly save many young lives.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "I will not raise your taxes." Guess who said that over a 28-day period last fall, actually thousands of times right on the TV screens of the 12 million people who populate our province? Guess who also signed the Taxpayer Protection Act, another great photo op? It was Dalton McGuinty, the man who was desperate to win the 2003 provincial election.

Anyone who might have read the Liberal campaign document also never read anything about a health premium. Why would anyone betray the citizens of Ontario by promising not to raise taxes and yet turn around and bring forth a budget with a health premium that is in stark contrast to anything the Liberal Party campaigned on? A complete betrayal.

The same man who, in eight years of the Harris-Eves government, never once lobbied his federal cousins for a fair share of the federal health care dollar; the same man who settled for over $600 million less in federal disaster relief as a result of SARS; the same man who wouldn't sign a resolution that both Mike Harris and Howard Hampton signed, calling on the federal government for a fair share of health care funding; the same man who never thought of mentioning a health care premium to Prime Minister Martin; the same man—Dalton McGuinty—who lives in fear of Prime Minister Martin, has now decided that Ontario's working families should bear the brunt of this draconian tax.

Our constituency week just ended. I talked to hundreds of people last week, and not one person supported the health premium—a huge tax raise. Instead, people were questioning why Ontario does not have recall legislation. They want McGuinty tossed out. Paul Martin now considers McGuinty a serious risk and is feverishly running to distance himself. Fair health care funding—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member for Mississauga West.

1350

SOUTHSIDE SHUFFLE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On behalf of the member from Mississauga South, I rise today to ask all members in the House, and the public, to record in their diaries the dates September 9, 10, 11 and 12. These are the Thursday through Sunday dates of the Southside Shuffle. The Southside Shuffle is a four-day extravaganza of more than 120 blues and jazz bands in the town of Port Credit, in the exotic riding of Mississauga South.

The Southside Shuffle was founded five years ago by Chuck Jackson and David Voice. Chuck is a two-time

Juno nominee and the winner in the year 2000 of the Maple Blues Award as the best male blues vocalist in Canada. He has been the lead singer of the Downchild Blues Band for 30 years and plays more than 15 engagements a year, as well as organizing the Southside Shuffle.

In its fifth year, 2003, the Southside Shuffle attracted more than 50,000 visitors to the town of Port Credit. While it may be too early to compare this to Mardi Gras in New Orleans, it is also important to note that visitors come all the way from Florida and Louisiana to attend this musical extravaganza.

I say to all members who appreciate good music, come to the Southside Shuffle on Thursday, September 9, through Sunday, September 12, in the town of Port Credit, where the rivers flow into Lake Ontario.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I'm pleased to draw attention today to World No Tobacco Day, May 31, on a worldwide basis.

As you know, the effects of tobacco use are widespread and devastating. The World Health Organization estimates that by 2020, tobacco will become the leading cause of death, killing more than 10 million people each year around the world.

Here in Ontario, the chronic health problems directly resulting from smoking are a huge drain on both our health care system and our economy. At least 6% of Ontario's $30-billion health care costs are directly related to smoking—approximately $1.8 billion of our health care bill each year.

The real cost of tobacco cannot be measured merely in dollars and cents but extends to lives lost and families shattered. As an example, tobacco kills about 50 Ontarians daily. That is why the McGuinty government intends to transform this province into a Canadian leader, with an aggressive plan against tobacco.

We're going to prevent young people from taking up smoking. We'll do this by making cigarettes more expensive and harder to purchase, having increased the taxes on cigarettes now by $5 a carton. Young people will be an essential element of our strategy. Those who smoke will be informed directly of the ill effects this universal evil perpetrates on the health of Ontarians and Canadians.

FORD MOTOR COMPANY OF CANADA

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I rise today to inform members that Ford of Canada will be celebrating its 100th anniversary on August 17, 2004. Ford of Canada, as many will know, was established in Windsor, Ontario, in 1904 at the Walkerville Wagon Co, making Ford of Canada the country's longest-established automaker. As well, this was the Ford Motor Co's first international expansion.

Since that time, Ford has grown to be one of the largest employers in our country, with 16,000 employees and 11,000 retirees, the vast majority of whom reside in Ontario. Ford of Canada also has a dealership network with approximately 500 dealers, which employs an additional 22,000 Canadians.

Over the last decade, Ford has invested over $9.5 billion in its Canadian operations, and in 2003 alone Ford of Canada sold 240,000 vehicles. Since its inception in 1904, Ford of Canada has produced approximately 25 million vehicles. Ford of Canada's Windsor operation produced over 1.1 million engines last year, making Windsor the engine capital for Ford Motor Co.

Please join me in celebrating the 100th anniversary of Ford of Canada, from its Oakville head office to its assembly plants in both Windsor and St Thomas.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TAXPAYER PROTECTION AFFIRMATION ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 CONFIRMANT LA PROTECTION DES CONTRIBUABLES

Mr Klees moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to affirm the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999 / Projet de loi 85, Loi visant à confirmer la Loi de 1999 sur la protection des contribuables.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): This bill affirms the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, as it read the day before Bill 83 was introduced. Bill 83, as you know, proposes to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act so that tax measures like the health premium can be introduced into the House without a referendum. That goes against the law of the Taxpayer Protection Act.

What this bill will do is reverse that amendment contained in Bill 83. In addition to that, it allows individuals who may have been charged by the crown prior to this bill to offset any funds that have been recovered by the crown.

So I would expect as well that members of the government be given a free vote to exercise their opinion on this bill.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do I have the members' consent to put forward that motion? Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following changes be made to the

ballot list of private members' public business: that Mr Ouellette and Mr Tascona exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr Ouellette assumes ballot item 58 and Mr Tascona assumes ballot item 25; that Mr Brown and Mr Crozier exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr Brown assumes ballot item 64 and Mr Crozier assumes ballot item 29; that Mr Mauro and Mr Lalonde exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr Mauro assumes ballot item 74 and Mr Lalonde assumes ballot item 27; and that pursuant to standing order 96(g), notice be waived for ballot items 23 and 25.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Monday, May 31, 2004, and Tuesday, June 1, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mr Duncan has moved that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Monday, May 31, 2004, and Tuesday, June 1, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it. Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1400 to 1405

The Speaker: The government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 114. All those in favour of the motion, please rise one at a time and be checked by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Flaherty, Jim	Parsons, Ernie
Baird, John R.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hardeman, Ernie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Racco, Mario G.
Broten, Laurel C.	Hudak, Tim	Ramal, Khalil
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Kennedy, Gerard	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Klees, Frank	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sorbara, Greg
Cordiano, Joseph	Levac, Dave	Takhar, Harinder S.
Craitor, Kim	Marsales, Judy	Tascona, Joseph N.
Delaney, Bob	Martiniuk, Gerry	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Matthews, Deborah	Wilkinson, John
Di Cocco, Caroline	McMeekin, Ted	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dombrowsky, Leona	Miller, Norm	Wong, Tony C.
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Mitchell, Carol	Yakabuski, John
Dunlop, Garfield	O'Toole, John	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those against, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Murdoch, Bill
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
Horwath, Andrea	Martel, Shelley	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 66; the nays are 8.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

1410

TYLER BOUTILIER

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes in memory of OPP Constable Tyler Boutilier, who was killed in the line of duty.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent that each party speak for up to five minutes? Agreed. The Minister of Community Safety.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I rise in the House today with the unanimous consent of all parties to offer words of respect and tribute on behalf of the province of Ontario in memory of Constable Tyler Boutilier.

Constable Boutilier died on Sunday, May 23, while responding to an emergency call. He had been a member of the Ontario Provincial Police since September 2000 and was attached to the OPP's Grenville detachment. His shift partner and best friend, Constable Rick Foley, remembered a young man who had excelled at his job and supported his friends. Constable Boutilier was just 32 years old and had been married for only eight months.

The magnitude of this tragedy was reflected in the outpouring of grief and sorrow in his hometown of Havelock, where Premier McGuinty and I, as well as other members of this Legislature, attended his funeral last Thursday. The Havelock United Church was filled to overflowing with family, friends and police officers with whom he served. About 1,500 police officers from the OPP, the RCMP and municipal services across Canada lined the street outside the church eight rows deep. But most touching of all was the sorrow expressed by the residents of Havelock, a community of just 600, who considered Constable Boutilier a hero. The main street was deserted and black ribbons were tied to trees in silent tribute.

The men and women who wear the badges of police officers know the risks they run. They know that each day they report to duty could be their last. And yet, they do this willingly. They do it because they love their jobs and are proud of the role they play in keeping our community safe. This sense of duty and pride ran strongly in Constable Boutilier. His sister, Kari Dart, who is also an OPP officer, said that he loved his position in the OPP and was extremely proud on the day she presented him with his badge—a badge he wore with distinction and courage.

One cannot imagine what the loss of this young man's life will mean to his wife, Lori; his parents, Sharon and

Lewis Boutilier; his fellow officers of the Grenville detachment and his friends, but I know they will always remember him as the fine and honourable man that he was.

Next year, Constable Boutilier's name will be added to those on the police memorial on the OPP's wall of honour. In this way, he and the ultimate sacrifice he made will be remembered forever.

Let us remember that he was a hero the day he assumed his badge. Let us remember that he died doing what he loved. And let us remember that he died making the world a little safer for all of us.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It is an honour to stand today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus and respond to the comments made by Minister Kwinter with respect to the untimely death of Constable Tyler Boutilier of the Grenville county detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police.

On the Victoria Day weekend, Constable Tyler Boutilier was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident while serving our province. Constable Boutilier joined the OPP just four years ago, in September 2000. By 2003, Tyler had become a member of the emergency response team, a goal he had set for himself since the beginning of his short career in the OPP.

It was an honour to join former Minister Runciman, Minister Kwinter, the Premier and other members of all three provincial parties at the funeral of Constable Boutilier at the Havelock United Church last Thursday. Police services from across our province were on hand to pay tribute to the life of Constable Tyler Boutilier.

In the last two weeks we have been reminded twice about the sacrifices the members of our police services provide to the citizens of our great province: first, the brutal murder of Constable Chris Garrett of the Cobourg Police Service, and then the tragic automobile accident that took the life of Tyler Boutilier. Each and every day of the year, the men and women who make up the police services of Ontario put their lives on the line. Many are fortunate and spend their careers unharmed, while others like Chris and Tyler pay the supreme sacrifice. We as members of this House respect and honour all those who are committed to making our roads, highways and communities more safe and secure so that we can live, work and raise our families without fear.

On behalf of our caucus, I want to pay our condolences and deep-felt loss to Tyler's wife, Lori; his parents, Lewis and Sharon; his sister, OPP Acting Detective Sergeant Kari Dart; her husband, Craig, and their children; to all of Tyler's colleagues in the OPP family in the Grenville county detachment and all of those other officers who serve our province on a day-to-day basis.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm pleased to be able to speak on behalf of New Democrats as we pay tribute to this bright, committed, young police officer.

As you travelled east on Highway 7 through the heartland of Ontario—this is small-town Ontario—and you saw the sign announcing, "Havelock, population 1,300," with the red ribbon tied around the signpost, it struck everyone travelling to that funeral that there wasn't a single person in that town who wouldn't have been touched by the death of this young man, their native son. Similarly, there wouldn't have been a single member of that town who didn't explode with pride upon realizing that one of their own, their native son, just a few brief years ago was sworn in as an Ontario Provincial Police officer. That's small-town Ontario.

Things are very different in small-town Ontario. All of us who were honoured to be able to attend that magnificent service in that small town of Havelock in that small United Church observed townsfolk lining the streets before, during and after that funeral as they watched that procession. When we observed thousands upon thousands of not just police officers but front-line emergency response personnel from across Canada standing in formation, at attention, outside that church throughout that service paying tribute to their fallen comrade, we understood, oh so viscerally, the regard and the esteem in which Tyler Boutilier was held by his family, his community, and his friends, but also the regard that all Canadians have for those front-line emergency personnel, police officers, who put their lives on the line each and every time they report for duty, having no realistic anticipation of what they may encounter during the course of that shift.

So I say this: Tyler Boutilier and his sister, who gave a moving eulogy; his comrade Rick Foley, another Ontario Provincial Police officer from the same year as Tyler Boutilier—I say that Tyler Boutilier was recognized, yes, as a hero, but also as a son of two very caring and grieving parents, as a caring brother, as an uncle, because we heard about the close and intimate relationship he had with his sister's two children, and by his young, beautiful wife, who, just as his parents had their son stolen from them far too soon, had her loving husband stolen from her far too early in their lives.

So we join in tribute to this young man, this young police officer. We join in expressing condolences to his grieving family and to his colleagues in the OPP detachment in which he served and to police officers who knew him throughout the region. And we join in saluting all police officers who, in the course of courageously fulfilling their responsibilities and obligations, risk their lives and, all too tragically, indeed surrender their lives.

As we pay tribute, let's commit ourselves to this: Let's all commit ourselves to giving our police officers, called upon to do incredibly difficult, incredibly dangerous and increasingly complex jobs, the support they need to do those jobs. Let's commit ourselves to ensuring that they have the tools and the resources to do those jobs as safely as possible, because to do anything less is to deny the incredible contribution to policing in Ontario of Tyler Boutilier, and to do anything less is to show less than appropriate regard for the incredible role that these women and men play in safeguarding ourselves, our families, and our communities and making them healthier, stronger and better places to live.

The Speaker: May we all rise for a moment of silence in respect for the life of this great individual.

The House observed a moment's silence.

1420

VISITOR

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): It is a privilege for me to recognize in the gallery Darbara Singh Randhawa, the magistrate registrar of marriages from Jalandhar in the province of Punjab, India, who is with us today. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT CONTRACT

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Working families in Ontario were shocked to learn that Dalton McGuinty hired Paul Martin's campaign manager to help him, and help you, prepare the budget and sell it to Ontarians—the budget where you broke your promise not to raise taxes and where you cut health care services to the people of Ontario. Essentially, Paul Martin's strategists helped you write the budget.

Will you table today all the information from this Liberal consulting contract and will you tell us how much Paul Martin's campaign manager was paid to help you break your promise not to raise taxes to the hard-working families and the people Ontario? Will you do that, Minister?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I would be pleased to provide that information to my friend and to the House when the final bills are in and all the addition is done. I would simply say to him, though, that he should preface his question by acknowledging that governments in this province, Ministers of Finance, have contracted for pre-budget research for 10 or 15 years. In fact, in the budget presented by Ernie Eves, the leadership campaign manager for Mr Eves, John Laschinger, was hired at a sum of $120,000 for his pre-budget work and we don't complain about that. What we do complain about is the fact that after the last budget, the great Magna budget, those folks spent $1 million sending highly partisan mailings to every household in the province. They should be ashamed of that. You can be sure there will be none of that on this side of the House.

Mr Baird: The question working families have is, before you entered into a contract with Paul Martin's campaign manager to help you break your promise not to raise taxes, there must have been a dollar figure established. Taxpayers in Ontario are entitled to know that before they vote on June 28. They're entitled to know that today, Minister. You should table that information today. I'd like you to stand in your place and tell us—tell all the taxpayers of Ontario—how much you paid Paul Martin's campaign manager to help you craft your budget.

I'd like to note that there are 58 full-time communications staff in your ministry and in the cabinet office. I'd also like to know, why couldn't the hard-working members of Ontario's public service have been put to use before you contracted Paul Martin's campaign manager to help you break your promise to working families in Ontario? Will you tell us that, Minister?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I can tell my friend from Nepean-Carleton that the communications department in the Ministry of Finance worked flat out. I have never seen people work as hard as the people in my ministry over the course of the two months before the budget was presented.

I think the important thing here is that this budget will bring about a transformation in health care; this budget will bring about Ontario having the best system of public education on the continent; this budget will begin to put the province back on a course toward financial health. That's really the message that came out of that budget, and every one of those communications people were anxious to get that message out. They've done so magnificently, and I'm very proud of them.

Mr Baird: Diane Flanagan, a spokesperson for you at the Ministry of Finance, confirmed to Alan Findlay of the Toronto Sun that the government never held a public tendering process for the contract that was given to Paul Martin's campaign manager, David Herle. She went on to say that Flanagan confirmed that the subcontracting idea came from you and your ministry itself. The people of Ontario want to know, how much did you pay Paul Martin's campaign manager to help craft this budget? Frank Graves, of a leading polling company, said, "It may well have been the most poorly received budget in contemporary political history in Canada." Will there be a value-for-money audit done on this con job that's been perpetrated on the people of Ontario? Stand in your place and tell us how much.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Once again my friend from Nepean-Carleton is trying to build a case that simply doesn't exist. He knows; he was in government for a while. He was an energy minister. Do you know that huge mess we had in energy in Ontario? He was the author of that.

I want to tell my friend that every single rule relating to contracting was abided by in our contract with Earnscliffe—every single rule. I do not believe that my friend would want to stand in his place and talk about the $1 million dollars that was spent in the last Tory budget to try and flog that piece in every household. In addition to that $1 million, they spent almost—I have the figures here; he wants exact figures—$246,000 on radio ads promoting the Magna budget. I want to tell you that would never happen over here.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I have a question to the Acting Premier: Just this past week, Paul Martin

joined the other two major political party leaders in pledging a significant increase in health care funding to the provinces. Dalton McGuinty's response: "What we have here is a promise made in the heat of a campaign, sir. The irony is off the Richter scale."

In light of these commitments from the three public leaders, will you now announce the cancellation of your new health tax, or are you planning the same test of Paul Martin that people out there are applying to Dalton McGuinty? They don't believe a single word that comes out of his mouth.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Let me tell my friend from Erie-Lincoln that all of us on this side of the House are very encouraged by the quality of the debate in the federal election campaign, particularly on health care. Each of the three parties understands that there is a serious crisis in the funding of health care in this country and indeed in this province.

The reason we brought in the Ontario health premium is that the crisis in Ontario was immediate. The financial mess and mismanagement left by the previous administration left us no alternative. But I want to tell you that I'm encouraged by what I'm hearing. The fact is, however, and my friend from Erie-Lincoln knows this, that those health care accords between provinces and the federal government could take several years to negotiate. We are ready to start the day after that campaign is over.

Mr Hudak: Acting Premier, this is what we heard this past week. Your new Dalton McGuinty health care tax is going to impose an over $1,000 tax hike on working-class families in Ontario—over $1,000 for middle-class families. At the same time, you're delisting services for chiropractic, physiotherapy and optometry. You may not know that insurance rates are going up, hydro is going up and gas and fuel taxes are going up. Your new tax hike is absolutely merciless.

Dalton McGuinty's name is like political poison across the province. At least a half dozen of your own backbenchers are coming out and publicly criticizing your budget. Will you put an end to this political poison? Will you back away from your delisting? Will you back away from this merciless tax hike on middle-class families?

1430

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend from Erie-Lincoln suggests that a premium on a middle-class family could be $1,000. He knows. He was here. He could reread the budget. The highest Ontario health premium is $900 per year. I want to tell my friend that, by contrast, in the province of Alberta, for example, even the lowest wage earners, in the area of $55,000 per family, pay over $1,000.

But that's not the point. The point to emphasize is that we are on the road to transform health care in this province. We are on the road to 36,000 more cardiac procedures by 2007-08. We are on the road to 8,000 more nurses in this province. We're on the road to 2,300 more joint replacements. We are on the road to creating a health care system that the people of Ontario want and are willing to pay for.

Mr Hudak: I don't know where the finance minister is coming from. Back where I come from, because taxes are so high, most of the time both spouses are working, which sends that tax rate over $1,000. If you don't know that, you're so far out of touch, you must be coming from another planet.

If you don't care about this merciless tax hike on taxpayers in the province of Ontario, if you don't care what your own backbenchers are saying about the tax hike and the delisting, maybe you care about Paul Martin and David Herle. That seems to be where your priorities are.

I'll ask you one more time. Paul Martin is putting so much distance between himself and Dalton McGuinty, it's looking like he and Alfonso Gagliano were best buddies all over again. Dalton McGuinty's name is political anthrax on the federal campaign.

One more time, because if you can back down today, you can back down down the road: Will you take away the delisting? Will you cancel your merciless tax hike on working families in Ontario?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Talk about delisting: That member was part of a government that said, about water inspectors, "Let's fire them." Nurses, 20,000 of them: "Let 'em go. We don't need 'em." Meat inspectors: "Let 'em go."

Interjection.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I'll tell my friend over there, my noisy friend from Nepean-Carleton, that the government he was a part of left a legacy of mismanagement and misrepresentation of the finances of this province which reached a new high-water mark right across the country. They will pay for it for decades.

TAXATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My first question is for the Acting Premier. Ontarians are furious with your tax grab on working families. They're furious that a single mom, making $30,000 a year, will see a shocking 24% increase in her provincial income tax. Meanwhile, someone with an income of $100,000 a year sees only a 6% increase.

Is this your definition of fairness? Is this what Dalton McGuinty meant when he said to working families, "I won't raise your taxes"? He won't raise the taxes of high-income people, but he's going to whack working people by 24%. Is that what you meant?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I am extremely proud of the fact that, for the first time in Canada, this province has instituted a health care premium that is geared to income, so that those at the lowest levels of income, those earning $20,000 in all, don't pay a thing. If you compare that, for example, to income premiums that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the member. I would like to hear the minister. If I could get less shouting on the other side, maybe I'll be able to hear that.

Hon Mr Sorbara: What I think is more important is what the premium pays for. The premium pays our bills so that we can be strong enough to acknowledge that we need to pay for the health care system that we have. The previous administration, during eight and a half years of very vibrant economic growth in Ontario, allowed our revenue base to deteriorate, so that revenues actually declined by 6%. We've turned that around with a progressive and fair premium system.

Mr Hampton: All those working families who are struggling on $30,000 a year, who can't pay the 20% increase in auto insurance premiums, who can't pay the 20% increase in hydro premiums, who can't pay their natural gas bills are going to be really happy to learn that the McGuinty Liberals think it's fair that that single mom gets a 24% increase in her provincial income taxes while Greg Sorbara, the Minister of Finance—what do you get, Greg, a 2% increase? Is that the Liberal definition of fairness in Ontario?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend from Kenora-Rainy River has one note to sing throughout his political career: Every problem can be solved by taxing the rich. Let me tell my friend from Kenora-Rainy River that the premium system we have introduced, the Ontario health premium, is the only health care premium in the country that is geared to income. That single mom he talked about who is paying that premium will now get, for her children, free vaccinations for pneumonia, meningitis and chicken pox. That single mom is going to have a community health care facility that will be there for her 24/7 in her community. That single mom, if her elderly parent is in long-term care, will get a much higher quality of long-term care.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr Hampton: The tax-the-poor Acting Premier wants people to believe that somehow the promises you make in your budget are worth more than the promises you've already broken. You remember those: the promise to freeze hydro rates, the promise to roll back toll increases on the 407, the promise to do away with the P3 hospitals—all those promises you've broken.

Here's the reality: Under the Conservatives, individuals with incomes over $100,000 a year got a 35% tax cut, and now you come along and say to those folks, "We'll give you a 6% tax increase." Meanwhile, a single mom struggling on $30,000 a year gets whacked with a 24% increase. Is that what Dalton McGuinty meant when he said, "I won't raise your taxes?" "Don't worry, you who have a high income, I won't raise your taxes, but I'm going to stick it to the poor." Is that what he meant?

Hon Mr Sorbara: One of the things my friend from Kenora-Rainy River does not want to do is acknowledge in this House that we have a relatively progressive tax system in Ontario. Let me give you an example. An Ontarian with one child making $24,000 a year will pay $1,230 in provincial income tax, including this premium. On the other end of the scale, in 2004 an Ontarian earning $1 million a year will pay a total tax of $447,295, including this premium. I'm proud of the tax system we have. I'm proud of the premium we brought in, but I'm more proud of what that premium will do to transform health care in Ontario and make us a leader in community-based health care.

1440

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: To the minister and Acting Premier, the millionaire gets less than a 1% increase in his income taxes as a result of your budget and a single mom on a $30,000-a-year income gets a 24% increase, and Liberals are proud of that? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves.

This single mom works as a teller at a bank. That's where she gets $30,000 a year, and her income tax is going up by 24%. When she works at the Royal Bank, which had profits of $750 million in just the last three months, do you know how much the taxes are going up for the Royal Bank as a result of your budget? Zero. Again, is that your definition of fairness? You go after the bank teller. You raise her income taxes by 24%, and you say to the Royal Bank, "You get off scot-free." Is that the Liberal definition of fairness?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend's line of questioning this afternoon just verges on scandalous. He knows full well that in the fall we introduced a bill, Bill 2, in this Parliament dealing with corporate income tax that increased our revenues for corporate income tax, on an annualized basis, by almost $3 billion. It should also be noted for the record that my friend from Kenora-Rainy River voted against that bill, as did every member of his caucus. Apparently, when it comes to voting, he will not vote for increased taxes on the Royal Bank. But when it comes to question period, he's only got one idol, and that is to raise corporate income taxes. I tell my friend he cannot have it both ways.

Mr Hampton: I'm learning more about the Liberal definition of fairness every minute here.

Let's take the accounting clerk at the Bank of Montreal, who is going to shell out an extra $450 on her income taxes. Meanwhile, the Bank of Montreal, which had a $602-million profit in the last three months alone—what did you do for them? Did you say they have to make an additional contribution to health care? No. In fact, you're going to give them, when your budget is fully implemented, a $1-billion tax reduction because you're doing away with the capital tax.

Is that the Liberal definition of fairness? You go after working families, you whack them again and again, and you say to banks like the Bank of Montreal, "Don't tell anybody, but we're giving you a $1-billion tax reduction when we eliminate the capital tax." Is that the Liberal definition of fairness?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend's rant is worthy of Jack Layton and his campaign on homelessness and the Clarity Act.

I simply tell my friend from Kenora-Rainy River that we are the first province in Canada that has made sure a health premium is geared to income, so that those with incomes under $20,000 pay absolutely nothing and the

highest-income earners pay as much as $900 a year. We are proud of the premium, sir. We're much prouder of what those resources are going to do in terms of better long-term care for seniors, better home care for those who can avoid hospitals by being treated at home, better community-based care, and clinics that are open and available 24 hours a day. We are very proud of that and our Ontario health premium is going to help fund that.

Mr Hampton: I have news for you, Acting Premier. The people of Ontario don't believe your promises any more. They know you will promise anything to get a vote and you will promise anything to get a headline, and people don't believe it.

I want to ask just one further question. You could have gotten about $700 million simply by plugging the employer health tax loophole for the largest corporations. There could have been some fairness there, but you didn't even do that. You're taking $2 billion out of the pockets of working families, and banks and corporations aren't paying anything additional as a result of your budget. Is that what Dalton McGuinty meant when he said, "I won't raise your taxes"? Was he speaking to the banks and the corporations? Is that what he meant when he went after working families and you whacked them to the tune of $2 billion a year? The tax freeze was only for corporations. Working families get whacked. Is that what you meant?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend apparently wants evidence. I should suggest to my friend that he be in this House when the estimates for this year and this budget are presented and he will see hundreds of millions of additional dollars being directed toward home care and hundreds of millions of additional dollars being directed toward better community care. I suggest that he be here when he sees in the estimates the funds that will go toward educating more nurses and the funds that will be available to allow foreign-trained doctors to be able to begin to practise medicine. I suggest that he come here and look at those estimates when he sees the increased funding that is going to help hospitals all over the province reduce waiting times. I suggest that he pay attention for a change.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Acting Premier. Your Liberal health plan, which I have right here, guaranteed all Ontarians "access to ... health care services based on need, not ability to pay."

In fact, you've used the Romanow report as a framework, and I quote from page 3 of your plan, where it says—and you're quoting Roy Romanow: "I challenged those advocating radical solutions—user fees ... delisting services, greater privatization.... There is no evidence that these solutions will deliver better or cheaper care, or improve access (except, perhaps, for those who can afford to pay out of their own pockets)."

Can you please tell working families today why you have broken your promise to guarantee access to health care and you are now advocating these radical solutions such as greater privatization and delisting services such as optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic? Why have you broken your promise?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): My friend, who is a former health minister, knows full well, and might have acknowledged in the preamble to her question, that none of the three services where we are reducing support—not delisting—are covered by the Canada Health Act.

Let's take them one by one. As far as optometry is concerned, we are simply no longer going to be paying for routine eye examination for those people between the ages of 20 and 65. That is the only part of optometry that is affected by our budget.

She knows as a former health minister that there are often difficult decisions about what should be covered and what shouldn't be covered. She knows that resources are needed to bring down waiting list times. She knows the horrible reality when those who are suffering from cancer cannot get appropriate treatment, when those who are suffering from serious heart problems cannot get treatment in hospitals in a reasonable amount of time. She knows that in our budget we are going to be able to provide much better access to these critical services, and as a result we have had to delist some less critical services.

Mrs Witmer: I say to the Acting Premier, your budget has ignited an anger that is going throughout this province like a brush fire. I have never, in all my years of elected office, received so many e-mails, faxes, letters or visits. In fact, your broken promise, your new draconian health care tax, is different—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mrs Witmer: Your new health care tax and your broken promise are different than anything before.

I want to quote the Kitchener-Waterloo Record in an editorial on Saturday where they state that this most basic promise of not raising or implementing new taxes was a different broken promise than the others since "it was nothing less than his most fundamental pledge, the beating heart of his contract with the people."

Then they go on to say:

"Viewed in this light, McGuinty's lie is of historic proportions"—

The Speaker: I know that the member would like to withdraw that.

Mrs Witmer: On behalf of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, I would withdraw that.

Interjections.

1450

The Speaker: I ask the member to withdraw.

Mrs Witmer: I'll withdraw that.

I say to the Acting Premier, will you now acknowledge that you have broken your contract with the more than 12 million people in the province of Ontario? Will you cancel the health care tax and restore the delisted services?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I'll tell my friend that we will begin to rebuild this province out of the chaos left to us on October 2. You fired 20,000 nurses; we're going to start hiring them back. When there was an opportunity to invest—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm not quite sure you're prepared for the answer, because I can't hear the answer. Minister, 10 seconds to wrap up.

Hon Mr Sorbara: When you had an opportunity to invest in public education, you did the tackiest of all things: You spent $1 billion sending $200 cheques to every citizen in the province. You fired water inspectors. You left this province with a structural deficit of $5 billion a year every year for the rest of our future. We're going to start to turn that around, and we're going build a province that is based on sound financial premises and high—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Acting Premier. On May 13, the people of Hamilton East delivered a message to your government. They're tired of your broken promises, and they elected me to bring that message to you. But you just haven't learned and you just haven't listened. How else to explain a budget that slams low- and modest-income households with hundreds and hundreds in new taxes? It's another broken promise. Your delisting of eye tests, physiotherapy and chiropractic services means that those same people will again have to dig deep into their pockets to pay for them. Minister, will you immediately relist those services so that OHIP covers them once again?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I want to welcome the new member from Hamilton East and tell her that I think she is going to have a great future in this Parliament until the next election, and I want to wish her well.

In answer to her question, I want to refer her back to her many years of excellent work on Hamilton city council. You've done budgets for a government. You understand the pressures that confront cities like Hamilton. You know that your council, the one you just left, was facing a financial crisis. You know that when you made your budget for this year, you delisted services. You said to the people of Hamilton, "We'd like to do that, but we can't do that anymore without raising taxes unacceptably." I want to tell my friend from Hamilton East that we do the very same thing in this Parliament that you did at Hamilton city council and that governments do right around the country.

Ms Horwath: Minister, maybe you don't know the people who live in Hamilton East the way that I do. The people in that riding have some of the lowest incomes in all Ontario. Many of them are out of work. Many of them had to retire early. Many of them have health problems that are very significant. They can't afford to pay for eye tests or physiotherapy or chiropractic services, but they sure do need the services. I've already got petitions from people coming in and telling me they need to have those services back in OHIP. Will you bring these critical health services back into OHIP, please?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I'll tell my friend that the people of Hamilton have also said to us, "Your investment in children's mental health will make a real difference." They have said to us, "Your investment in new nurses is going to help us to open a new community health care centre." They have said to us, "What you're going to be investing in long-term care is going to make a real difference to my mom or dad in a long-term-care facility." And what they have said to us in Hamilton—and I'll tell my friend, you know this very well—is that the investments we're going to make in home care are going to transform the way in which our health care system responds positively and compassionately when one of us is sick and needs care urgently. I am very proud of those reforms.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): My question is to the Attorney General. Hamilton was deeply saddened this past week by the brutal attack on an innocent victim as she opened her store in Jackson Square. I understand today that the Ministry of Community and Social Services has invested in enhanced programs for victims of violence and sexual assault. I know in my own riding of Hamilton West, the sexual assault centre will be receiving much-needed funds to create a peer support network for victims of assault. Minister, can you tell me, please, the other ways this funding will assist these victims of assault across the province?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Yes, to the honourable member for Hamilton West: This is, I think, news of hope for victims of sexual assault and sexual violence. The announcement today is going to affect communities across the province. Eighteen communities will be receiving these funds from the victims' justice fund. They will be used for everything from counselling to peer support networks to ensuring that children are well served, that women are getting the treatment they need immediately and that victims of sexual assault and sexual violence are never revictimized.

They need to know that the government of Ontario is doing everything they can to prevent sexual assault and sexual violence from happening in the future. They also need to know that there are services in place that reflect the diversity of victims and communities in Ontario, that there is no cookie-cutter solution and that we are trying to respond to each community's needs. This is good news and, I think, positive hope for those wishing to get their lives back after the horrific crime of sexual assault and sexual violence.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Ms Marsales: To Minister Pupatello: You mentioned money earmarked for victims of sexual violence. This is great news for women and, more importantly, a great example of this government's commitment to addressing

violence against women as we mark the end of Sexual Assault Prevention Month. We know that right now an estimated 500,000 women in Canada are sexually assaulted in one year, but less than 10% of those women actually report this violence to police. Can you tell us what today's announcement means to women who are victims of sexual assault?

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Thank you so much for that question. I can tell you that today's announcement of 18 different programs is particularly for front-line work by those dealing with those who have been sexually assaulted.

I can tell you, as a finale event while we promote Sexual Assault Prevention Month, it was a fine morning. Our Attorney General committed funding in 18 different municipalities for 18 different programs that involve one-on-one counselling and a handbook to be created, in one case, for parents and their young children—very progressive and innovative projects. We were pleased to do that today at the Toronto abuse council.

Let me say, as we go forward as a government over these next four years, we intend to develop a solid, workable plan for domestic abuse in general. Today was a wonderful example of that.

1500

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Acting Premier. Promise number 152, thanks to Lorrie Goldstein and his handy compilation of promises, says, "We will make our institutions more democratic by freeing your MPP to represent you." That was by Mr McGuinty last year. I was shocked, therefore, to read in the CanWest News Service this weekend that one Andrew Steele, the Liberal caucus director, strategic research and policy—a big title—who I don't believe is a member of this Legislature, has written a memo directing all the MPPs on the other side, and a few on this side, about certain lines they are to use with respect to the budget bill. I know, Acting Premier, that you would not have let this happen, that you would not let an unelected person direct the elected Liberal MPPs, and that you would want to be consistent with your promise of "freeing your MPP to represent you." Please assure the House that you are going to free your Liberal MPPs.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'll tell my friend from Whitby-Ajax that the budget we presented had the input of every single member of this wonderful Liberal caucus. The fact that in our budget, for the first time in 12 years, we give social assistance recipients a raise is something that every single member of this caucus supports; the fact that for the first time in years we have put specific provisions in our budget to assist the economy and communities in northern Ontario is supported by every single member of this caucus; the fact that we made sure to do something specific for children's mental health, an area that caucus and that government ignored for years, is supported by every single member of this caucus. We are very proud of the work we have done in that regard.

Mr Flaherty: That's OK. Promise number 152 is broken. Thank you, Acting Premier.

Now we'll move on to promise number 160: "We will give your elected representative more power.... We will make sure non-cabinet MPPs"—all you non-cabinet MPPs, pay attention—"are free to criticize and vote against government legislation"—but there's an exception—"with the exception of explicit campaign promises and confidence matters."

Here's the problem, Acting Premier: explicit campaign promises number 65, "I will not raise taxes," 69, "I will hold the line on taxes" and 70, "I will live by the balanced budget law." Remember those explicit promises? Here's the dilemma: You've got a budget bill that the non-cabinet MPPs are supposed to vote for—it's a confidence matter—but you have explicit campaign promises that the non-cabinet MPPs are supposed to vote for. Which is the correct one? Are they supposed to vote to break the explicit campaign promises, or are they supposed to vote against the budget?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I will tell you, Mr Speaker, what they should do and what they are doing. They are working as a strong, powerful, dynamic, articulate caucus to help in the job of rebuilding this province. They are working in committees of this Legislature. For the first time ever, they are working in committees of cabinet to start to rebuild Ontario.

My friend was once a finance minister. It will sit on his head and his political future that, during a time of vibrant economic growth in Ontario, he allowed this province to fall into serious financial trouble such that by the time the election was called, we had a structural deficit of almost $5 billion in this province. That's a credit to the horrible work he did while in government.

BUDGET SECURITY

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Deputy Premier. This past week has proved an old adage—and we've actually seen it—that the Liberals in Ontario are directly tied to the hip of the Liberals in Ottawa. How else can you explain the phone call from the Premier to the Prime Minister with a heads-up for some 20 seconds or 20 minutes, whatever it was, on your regressive health tax? The convention on budgets is quite specific. It says that the budget details cannot be released to anyone outside of cabinet, and that includes Prime Ministers. That's why you had, and I participated in, a very elaborate lock-up. Quite frankly, I think you broke the rules and I think the Premier broke the rules as well. My question to you is, with whom else was this privileged and secret information released prior to budget day?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I know the Premier has had a number of conversations over the course of many months with the Prime Minister. I am

delighted that the Prime Minister has made health care in Canada one of the major components of his campaign. I am very impressed with the analysis the Prime Minister has done in taking through some of the challenges that we face right across the country, and that he understands as a former finance minister that we are going to have to work together to find the resources to finance the health care system we need. I am delighted that in his campaign he has put specific figures on the table. It certainly will take some time after the election to sit down and negotiate a deal, but I think the table is set for better health care in Canada, and better health care because of what we've done in our budget and what the Prime Minister is proposing after this election.

Mr Prue: My question is not what the Prime Minister is going to do; it's how he got his hands on that information, which was privileged and secret to all people, including him. There's another one, a Mr David Herle, the Prime Minister's campaign chair. He was a key advisor to your budget. I heard the earlier questions where you were not willing to say how much money you're going to pay him. And we're not even going to ask if it was an untendered contract, because it was.

Here we have an example of the Premier breaking other rules. He has divulged sensitive information about new tax measures. It reminds me a little bit of that old movie Dr Dolittle with the animal, the push me-pull you. They're both saying the same thing but they're going in opposite directions, just like the federal and provincial Liberals. In the past, ministers have resigned for leaking budgets, and this is a leaked budget. It gave an unfair advantage to those people in the federal Liberal circle who were privy to information they should not have known. My question to you is twofold: To whom else were the details leaked, and why should Paul Martin have known about the budget before the members of this Legislature knew about it?

Hon Mr Sorbara: The fog started to set in around the Dr Dolittle part, but I think we got to the other side of the pond. He knows that in the creation of every budget, every jurisdiction, consultations take place in anticipation of making decisions. I think the Premier answered the question yesterday with respect to his conversation with Mr Martin. Other than that, I can tell him with absolute certainty that the security and management of budget confidentiality during this past budget were of the very highest standard and we met the requirements 100%.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. In the wonderful riding of Oakville, we have a prosperous business community. We're also home to many large businesses, including some valuable members of the Ontario auto industry. One of the largest and best employers in my riding is Ford of Canada and the Oakville assembly plant. Last week, Ford announced that it would idle its Freestar assembly plant for one week in early June. This announcement affects many people who live in my riding of Oakville. Can you tell me what this government is doing to help auto workers in Oakville?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): Ford is making what amounts to a business decision with respect to idling its workers. Let me tell you that our government is very proud of the fact that we are doing a lot for the auto sector, and auto workers in particular. We announced, as you know, the Ontario automotive investment strategy, which is designed to leverage $500 million into $5 billion worth of investments across this province. We have every reason to expect that things will go very well in the future for the auto sector. It is strong; it is the linchpin of our economy. This McGuinty government is very much committed to making the auto sector even stronger than it is.

1510

Mr Flynn: While the Ford plant is a big part of Oakville's economy, it's not the only part. Oakville has over 260 head offices and more than 45 other businesses located in the community, the majority of which are small businesses. These businesses include over 100 in the information technology sector, another 100-plus in the engineering sector and over 120 in the financial sector. Minister, can you tell me what the government is doing to help these businesses and, by extension, the economy of the town of Oakville?

Hon Mr Cordiano: The small businesses of our province are the lifeline of every community, the very heart and soul of it. I'm very proud of the fact that this government recognizes that small businesses create many of the new jobs in our province. To that end, the Minister of Finance is ensuring the health of small businesses by increasing the limit for small business income from $320,000 to $400,000. That's certainly going to help many small businesses.

As well, we are creating a one-stop access Web portal for small businesses, and we are going to see the advent of a new small business agency to assist small businesses directly. My parliamentary assistant, Tony Wong, has been working with the small business community.

But let me say this as well: The recent budget announcement with respect to critical investments that we're making for our health care system—I say to my colleagues opposite that we have one of the greatest competitive advantages in this province, something you forgot about when you were in office: our health care system. It gives our businesses a competitive cost advantage. It allows us to compete internationally. That's why the Minister of Finance is allowing us to invest in our health care system: to make certain that we continue to have that competitive advantage. It had fallen on hard times. We were not making crucial investments in our infrastructure. That's why—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Deputy Premier. The Prime Minister, just two hours ago,

joined 12 million Ontarians in condemning your government for breaking its promises. Just two hours ago, Canadian Press: "Martin said politicians must plan for economic surprises as they roll out their campaign promises.

"'It's not enough to say how you're going to be able to pay for them under the best of circumstances,' he said.

"'You've got to say how you're going to pay for them under very differing circumstances.... If I come to you and ask you to vote for me because I'm going to do certain things, and I don't do them, then I have broken faith.'"

Deputy Premier, based on Paul Martin's definition of breaking trust, has the Premier of this province broken trust with the people of Ontario?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I tell you that what we've done is ensure that the environment of financial circumstances, as presented before the last election, can never happen again. This Legislature, in its wisdom, will pass the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act because, rather than an election taking place around the fantasy of the Magna budget, that bill, if it becomes law, will require that the government of the day put forward the real financial circumstances of the province and that that report be certified or rendered by the Provincial Auditor. That will ensure that we have a stronger democracy and that no government ever will be able to do what happened last time around with the Magna budget and the events that followed.

Mr Klees: I don't believe the Deputy Premier even believes his own words today. The fact of the matter is that the Premier made the promise not to increase taxes even after he got the Peters report. Peters reported that there was a deficit. Even after that, on numerous occasions, he said, "I will not raise taxes."

I have travelled this province for the last week. It doesn't matter whether it was Ottawa, Cornwall, Kingston, Toronto or York region, here is what people are very, very concerned about: On the one hand, they know they've been deceived by this Premier. More important than that deception is the fact that they now see this government willing to put aside the law of the province and increasing taxes without a referendum. I want to know whether this Premier is prepared—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Klees: —to put in place a referendum to justify what he's doing to the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Could I ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary word.

Mr Klees: Speaker, if you're asking me to withdraw the reference to deception—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Could I ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary word.

Mr Klees: I'll withdraw.

In that case, what I would like to do is rephrase my question.

The Speaker: Sorry. I think the question has been asked.

Mr Klees: Do you think—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I have a very good idea of where the member was going with his question. I find it totally unacceptable. I tell my friend from Oak Ridges that the health premium that we brought to this province in the budget will be presented in a piece of legislation which will be entirely consistent with the rules and the laws of this province. For my friend to go on about "illegal," "deception" and all that stuff, I reject it entirely. It's unacceptable. It's not worthy of you. You shouldn't be doing it.

What you should be talking about, in your riding and across the province, is that finally we are getting on with rebuilding our health care system, rebuilding our education system and putting this province back on a strong financial footing. I'm very proud of that.

HEALTH CARE

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Acting Premier. Minister, on May 28 your Premier received the following letter, which reads:

"Dear Premier,

"Ever since your Minister of Finance tabled his budget, I have had a great number of constituents express their dismay at the cancellation of the chiropractic subsidies."

He goes on to describe that in northern Ontario, where there is mining and forestry, many back and neck injuries occur. It's as a result of an intervention by a chiropractor that people return to work much more rapidly. The writer says, "I am therefore adding my voice to those who, for one reason or another, cannot afford to pay for such services. I also trust that your government will respect the universality of health care services in Ontario."

It's signed by Rég Bélair, who is the federal MP for Timmins-James Bay. It's probably the first time that I've ever agreed with Rég Bélair. Minister, will you stop the delisting of chiropractic services?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I think that perhaps there is some possibility of salvation for my friend, now that she's agreeing more with Liberal members and Liberal candidates. Let's get it straight on chiropractic, OK? The maximum impact that delisting could have on an individual is $150—not one penny more in personal payments.

But my friend, who is very familiar with the workers' compensation system, knows that there is no delisting for any chiropractic service that is required by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board; that there is no delisting of chiropractic required as a result of an insured accident; that there is no delisting of services in physiotherapy for seniors; that there is no delisting of optometry for young people and seniors. So my friend ought to put this in some perspective. There will be a minor impact, the trade-off for services that will be enhanced.

1520

Ms Martel: I should just point out that Rég Bélair is so angry, he's not even running again. I wouldn't use that as a very good example of me supporting the Liberals in some way, shape or form.

Listen, he's not the only one who is angry. I received over 280 letters and faxes in my constituency office last week. Many are from people who are on a fixed income. They aren't covered by private insurance and cannot afford to pay the additional costs for chiropractic services. They are already paying for health care through their taxes. They are going to pay again because of your new, aggressive health tax. They should not have to pay a third time, out of their own pockets, for chiropractic services, for eye care or for physiotherapy.

I say to you again: These are important health care services. They should continue to be covered under OHIP. Will you reverse your decision to delist, privatize, these important health care services?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I will simply tell my friend that the added benefits that we will bring to children's mental health, to shorter waiting times for cardiac procedures, for shorter waiting times for joint replacements, for the other investments that we are making, even today in the north in hospitals in Sudbury and Sault Ste Marie—all of which comes out of a health care budget—the additions that we are going to be making to community care and home care: These, I tell my friend, are very tough decisions, but I'm absolutely sure that they are the right decisions. I'm very proud of the way in which we are going to transform health care, particularly in the northern part of this province.

PETITIONS

FISH HATCHERY PROGRAM

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources' provincial fish hatchery program annually stocks over 10 million fish into 1,200 water bodies within the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas provincial fish hatcheries contain unique genetic strains of indigenous fish species; and

"Whereas recreational fishing is a multi-billion-dollar industry and a huge contributor to tourism and the economy throughout the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the world-class Great Lakes salmon fishery, as well as many local fisheries throughout the province, are dependent on the Ministry of Natural Resources' fish stocking program;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources to refrain from any cutbacks or cancellations to this provincially significant program."

I sign my name in full agreement.

PORTLANDS ENERGY CENTRE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a petition which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario Power Generation and TransCanada PipeLines propose to build the Portlands Energy Centre (PEC), a 550-megawatt power plant in the port lands near Cherry Beach in Toronto;

"Whereas PEC is promoted by proponents as an alternative to coal-fired power, an interim step toward the transition to greener energy infrastructure for Ontario;

"Whereas at the same time there is no stated guarantee that its construction will lead to the necessary closure of coal-fired power plants;

"Whereas at the same time it is unclear that the proposed project will proceed to be built as a co-generation facility that produces both hydro and steam through cleaner and efficient technology;

"Whereas at the same time there are critical questions that have to be answered about how the proposed plant will impact the local air quality, climate change, local water and wildlife of Toronto and subsequently southern Ontario, areas that already are severely affected by poor air quality and other environmental damage;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario urge the Minister of the Environment to support the community's call for a full, individual environmental assessment of the Portlands Energy Centre to be conducted to resolve these crucial questions."

I affix my signature to this petition.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by a number of small retail business owners from the riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas section 3.1 of the Tobacco Control Act suspends a retailer's licence to sell tobacco products for a maximum of one year, we petition the assembly to amend section 3.1 to use fines in place of suspensions;

"Whereas, under the Tobacco Control Act, it is illegal to sell tobacco products to a person under the age of 19, it is legal for a person under 19 years to purchase tobacco products. We petition the assembly to make it a legal offence for a person under 19 years to possess tobacco.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Amend section 3.1 of the Tobacco Control Act, using fines instead of suspensions for penalties.

"Amend the law to make it an offence to possess tobacco products under the age of 19 years."

I too affix my signature.

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition, with hundreds of signatures from my constituents in Parry Sound-Muskoka, to keep Muskoka as part of northern Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the district of Muskoka is currently designated as part of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the geography and socio-economic conditions of Muskoka are very similar to the rest of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the median family income in the district of Muskoka is $10,000 below the provincial average and $6,000 below the median family income for greater Sudbury; and

"Whereas removing the district of Muskoka from northern Ontario would adversely affect the hard-working people of Muskoka by restricting access to programs and incentives enjoyed by residents of other northern communities; and

"Whereas the residents of Muskoka should not be confused with those who cottage or vacation in the district; and

"Whereas the federal government of Canada recognizes the district of Muskoka as part of the north; and

"Whereas this is a mean-spirited and politically motivated decision on the part of the McGuinty government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government maintain the current definition of northern Ontario for the purposes of government policy and program delivery."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

OPTOMETRISTS

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the last funding agreement between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Association of Optometrists expired March 31, 2000; and

"Whereas the optometric fees for OHIP-insured services remain unchanged since 1989; and

"Whereas the lack of any fee increase for 15 years has created a crisis situation for optometrists; and

"Whereas fees for OHIP services do not provide for fair or reasonable compensation for the professional services of optometrists in that they no longer cover the costs of providing eye examinations; and

"Whereas it is in the best interests of patients and the government to have a new funding agreement for insured services that will ensure the most vulnerable members of society are able to receive the eye care they need;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care resume negotiations immediately with the" association "and appoint a mediator to help with the negotiation process in order to ensure that the optometrists can continue to provide quality eye care services to patients in Ontario."

I agree with the petitioners, and I affix my signature to this.

AJAX-PICKERING HOSPITAL

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from a thousand of my constituents. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas at the time the Centenary Health Centre and Ajax-Pickering hospitals amalgamated under the umbrella of the Rouge Valley Health System, a commitment was made by the Health Services Restructuring Commission that the communities of Whitby/Pickering/Ajax, according to the amalgamation agreement, would not lose a full-service hospital and would maintain all existing services; and

"Whereas municipal governments in the region of Durham have provided financial support to the Rouge Valley Health System on the understanding that Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service hospital; and

"Whereas numerous service clubs and other organizations have also raised money in support of the expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital and services provided therein such as the maternity unit on the understanding that the Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service facility; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health System has changed its strategic plan without consulting its key stakeholders, such as the residents who use the hospital, the doctors, nurses and other professional staff that work within the system and the local governments and organizations that fund the hospital; and

"Whereas this has led to a decrease in the level of service provided by the maternity unit and the number of acute care beds;

"We, the undersigned concerned citizens of west Durham, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That a full-service hospital with all the existing services at the time of amalgamation be maintained at the Ajax-Pickering site and new services added as the population continues to grow and age, as agreed to by the Ajax-Pickering General Hospital and Centenary Health Centre in the amalgamation agreement signed May 31, 1998."

I affix my signature to this petition.

FISH HATCHERY PROGRAM

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources' provincial fish hatchery program annually stocks over 10 million fish into 1,200 water bodies within the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas provincial fish hatcheries contain unique genetic strains of indigenous fish species; and

"Whereas recreational fishing is a multi-billion-dollar industry and a huge contributor to tourism and the economy throughout the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas a world-class Great Lakes salmon fishery as well as many local fisheries throughout the province are dependent on the Ministry of Natural Resources' fish stocking program;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources to refrain from any cutbacks or cancellations to this provincially significant program."

I've signed this.

1530

TTC RIGHT-OF-WAY

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of the Environment that reads as follows:

"Whereas an environmental assessment is underway on St Clair Avenue West to study potential transit improvements, including the possibility of installing a dedicated TTC right-of-way;

"Whereas the consultation process so far has been in bad faith, top-down and rushed, which has disappointed and angered the local community almost entirely, and not been up to any acceptable public standards;

"Whereas comments by the chair and the members of the Toronto Transit Commission have made it clear that there is a predetermined outcome to the environmental assessment process, regardless of the objections of the local community;...

"Whereas a dedicated right-of-way would force significantly more traffic on to our local streets;...

"Whereas traffic bottlenecks at certain intersections and underpasses are already terrible...;

"Whereas the right-of-way will have substantial negative economic effects on local businesses;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, strongly urge the Minister of the Environment to order a full environmental assessment on St Clair Avenue West, one that genuinely consults and takes into consideration the views and opinions of the local community."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to put my signature to it.

WATER QUALITY

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I have a petition concerning the new Ontario Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002, Ontario regulation 170/03, and I have several thousand signatures here.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government is implementing regulation 170/03, and in doing so will affect town halls, churches and private property owners including small businesses, local community centres and campgrounds; and

"Whereas meeting the requirements of regulation 170/03 has meant and will mean excessive costs and financial burdens for all drinking water system owners; and

"Whereas there is no demonstrated proof that this new regulation will improve drinking water that has been and continues to be safe in rural municipalities; and

"Whereas Ontario regulation 170/03 was passed without adequate consultation with stakeholders throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas stakeholders should have been consulted concerning the necessity, efficacy, economic, environmental and health impacts on rural Ontario;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario abandon the implementation of and immediately repeal regulation 170/03, as well as amending the pertinent enabling legislation."

I support this petition and sign my name to it.

GARDERIES D'ENFANTS

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): « À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que les gardiennes en résidences privées sont limitées à cinq enfants à la fois, selon la Loi sur les garderies;

« Attendu que les enfants scolaires ont besoin d'un toit avant et après l'école pour 90 minutes à la fois et que ces enfants âgés entre quatre ans et 10 ans servent d'un heureux modèle pour les jeunes;

« Attendu que les programmes avant et après l'école sont complets, et que les parents ont un urgent besoin d'un endroit supervisé pour les enfants d'âge scolaire;

« Attendu que les parents auront une place assurée pour les enfants scolaires auprès des gardiennes qu'ils fréquentent depuis longtemps;

« Attendu que les gardiennes en résidence privée ne sont pas syndiquées et qu'elles ont besoin de travailler au même titre que les personnes travaillant dans les garderies syndiquées;

« Nous, les soussignés, présentons la pétition suivante à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Que le gouvernement de l'Ontario apporte la modification suivante sur la définition de la garde d'enfants en résidence privée comprise dans la Loi sur les garderies permettant un nombre plus élevé de cinq enfants de moins de 10 ans. »

J'y ajoute ma signature. La pétition provient de la région d'Embrun.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of the people in Dr Peter

Seca's office in Beamsville, like Margaret Guay from Jordan Station and Ada Laws of Vineland. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Dalton McGuinty Liberals promised a health care system that gives us all the care we need when we need it; and

"Whereas chiropractors, optometrists and physiotherapists provide the necessary health care to the people of Ontario to maintain healthy and active lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should keep their promise to invest in health care and restore funding to cover optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic care under OHIP."

In support, I add my signature.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp (MPAC) and are subject to property taxes; and

"Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourism economy without requiring significant municipal services; and

"Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003; and that the tax not be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers and trailer parks, municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders."

I'll affix my signature to the petition.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario government is implementing regulation 170/03, and in doing so will affect town halls, churches and private property owners including small businesses, local community centres and campgrounds; and

"Whereas meeting the requirements of regulation 170/03 has meant and will mean excessive costs and financial burdens for all drinking water system owners; and

"Whereas there is no demonstrated proof that this new regulation will improve drinking water that has been and continues to be safe in rural municipalities; and

"Whereas Ontario regulation 170/03 was passed without adequate consultation with stakeholders throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas stakeholders should have been consulted concerning the necessity, efficacy, economic, environmental and health impacts on rural Ontario;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario abandon the implementation of and immediately repeal regulation 170/03, as well as amending the pertinent enabling legislation."

It is signed by a great number of constituents in Ontario, and I add my signature to this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004
SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Mr Sorbara moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures / Projet de loi 83, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mr Sorbara has moved second reading of Bill 83. Is it the pleasure of the House—Mr Sorbara.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I thought for a moment we were going to just have second and third reading without further debate.

The Speaker: It will be a pleasure to hear you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: It is an honour, a privilege, and I am delighted to be beginning the debate on this very important bill, which is really one of the foundation stones of the budget that we presented in this House just over a week ago, on May 18.

I should let you know that I'm going to be making some introductory remarks about the budget and then I will be sharing my time with my colleagues from London-Fanshawe, Kitchener Centre and my parliamentary assistant, the wonderful member from Eglinton-Lawrence, who has been so incredibly helpful over the course of these many months that we've been working on this budget.

Every budget in every Parliament brings about a debate that will span the province and sometimes the country. Although there is a lot of politics—and we're in the midst of a federal election campaign, so that expands the politics—there really are five important things about this budget that I think the people of Ontario need to know about.

The first one is that we are taking enormous steps to make sure that we have a health care system that the people of this province can rely on. We're investing more money in health care, but that's not the important thing. The most important thing is the changes that those additional revenues will bring about.

In health care, we are investing in the movement from hospital care and care in doctors' offices to a more community-based care. Significant new funds are going to go to community health care centres, and we will open some 150 new facilities that will have family health care teams practising and providing care 24/7—around-the-clock health care.

1540

We're going to be investing in a higher quality of home care. I remember, from the day I was re-elected to this Parliament in the by-election of June 2001, how I heard about the shortcomings in home care in every single community. It was a chorus in unison: "We're not funding home care, and that's putting additional pressure on our hospitals. Those who could be treated in homes are staying in hospital beds, and that's having a negative effect on our emergency wards." So we're going to invest in home care.

We're going to invest as well in long-term care, because our seniors deserve a quality of care that respects what they have given to their province and their country over the course of their lives. I remember the debates in this House about how long-term care had deteriorated in Ontario over the past number of years. The debate centred around one bath per week, and when you think about that, it's just irresistible to say in a budget of a Liberal government that we're going to get on with reforms in the quality of long-term care.

So the first important thing you need to know about this budget is what it will do to improve the quality of health care in Ontario from, as I said, the movement toward care in the community to a much better level of care for our elderly.

But the thing that lifted my spirits was the ability in this budget to say something about children's mental health and to be able to allocate some $25 million to improve children's mental health. I hear my wonderful friend the Minister of Children's Services banging her desk in delight, and I have to tell her publicly in this chamber that her passionate plea to get on with some additional resources in this area was one of the things that took the bucket.

When you hear about the real problems in our community, particularly—mental health is something we don't like to talk about. We do not like to admit that these problems exist. When it's with our kids, the notion that we, as a government and as a political party, can do something about that—the heart just leaps for joy. It's not a lot of money and it's not everything we need to do, but it's a really important start. So we're transforming health care. That's number one.

Number two, we are making historic investments in education. Those who follow Ontario politics know that for the past 10 years our schools have been a war zone. A huge disservice to our children, the battle between a Conservative government and teachers, and between Conservative governments and administrators, was an embarrassment to all of us. That's coming to an end, and we're making the investments in education that our children need and deserve. We are not going to stop until we have North America's leading public education system, because that is the very best way to invest in the future. So the second thing you need to know about is what we're doing in education.

The third thing you need to know about is how we're going to transform support for our communities, large and small, north and south, east and west. What we were left with in funding of municipalities—it will drive you to distraction if you get into the details, but all you have to do is talk to any mayor or any councillor about how it has not been working.

In the city of Toronto, we're making historic investments in public transit. In the smallest northern community we are going to put forward resources that will help those communities provide good-quality local services. So the third thing you need to remember is that we are changing the way we fund our communities so they can thrive and provide a high quality of life in terms of municipal services to their residents.

The fourth thing you need to know is that, for the first time in almost nine years, a budget in Ontario speaks to Ontario's most vulnerable, that we are finally doing something for those who, because of circumstances, have only the Ontario disability support program for all of life's necessities. What we allot to them on a monthly basis hasn't gone up in 12 years, and that's an embarrassment in a province that is one of the richest jurisdictions in all of the continent. What we're doing for Ontario's most vulnerable sends out a powerful signal about our values as a Liberal government.

For our senior citizens, we are adding to financial support an increase of 25% to the Ontario property tax credit for seniors, because we are very concerned that seniors in their homes do not have the ability to go and get a second job or find additional resources, more income. They can't do it. I heard so many seniors during the election campaign say to me in their own wonderful way, "Having trouble staying, paying the bills, taxes, gasoline, all that sort of stuff." We're making a significant new investment to help our seniors continue to have vibrant lives in their own homes, and I'm very proud of that. That's the fourth thing you need to know about this budget.

The fifth and, in a sense, the most important thing that you need to know is that this budget will bring Ontario back to sound financial health. I don't need to go on about what those guys over there left us. It was a financial calamity of historic proportions, particularly because we created in the Ontario government this structural deficit during really good economic times. I contrast this with what the Bob Rae government had to cope with when, shortly after they came to government, the province, the country, the continent went into very serious financial times, and they did run large deficits and they did create huge financial challenges for their successors. But to be fair to them, they were difficult economic times. From 1994 to 2003 it was pretty good. We've got a growing economy. We've got resources in Ontario, in

our workforce—our abilities are just at an historic high. Yet when we came to government, we had a $5.6-billion problem. And it's not just one year; it's structural. That is, if you don't make changes, it will last forever. That's what that means. The fifth and perhaps most important thing that you need to know about this budget is that it will get Ontario on the road to financial health.

How are we going to do that? Straight forward. We're going to run a tight ship. We have the courage to raise the revenues that we need to pay for the health care that we want. We're going to invest in our province, particularly in those areas where we have some weakness. I just came back from northern Ontario. They are thrilled that, for the first time in years, a budget spoke to their specific needs.

I could go on about this thing. I've been talking about only this for the past 12 days, but I want to cede my time to my colleagues who are going to participate. I just want to encourage this House to examine Bill 83 in fine detail and I hope, having done that, this House will give it unanimous support.

1550

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm honoured, as usual, to stand up in this place and speak on behalf of my great constituents in London-Fanshawe.

Today we listened to the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Greg Sorbara, start talking about the budget, give us some lead on the budget. It definitely is a very crucial time. The timing for the budget came in the midst of a federal election, which gives the budget a lot of political analysis, a lot of talk in the backrooms and the papers, which have been used by many parties in this province and across this country to slash the Liberal Party, whether provincially or federally. We get the chance, after the announcement of the budget, to go back to our constituents, which we call constituency week.

First, I was honoured and proud of the government, which is led by the Premier, Dalton McGuinty, when they decided to announce and launch the budget from this place, not from private places. Traditionally, this place is meant to be the House of the people of this province. All the main issues should be discussed, and should be started, from this place. This was a very good start and a very positive move on behalf of this government.

As I mentioned, we went to our ridings. We talked to many constituents. We received many different calls. We talked to the media. We held meetings. We called people in to listen to their opinion, their reaction to this budget.

There certainly was a mixed reaction, because many people in this province were misinformed. They've been listening to different signals and messages from different parties, not for the sake of the people of this province, but for the sake of gaining some cheap political advance over what's going on in this province.

I'm one of the people of this province who got the chance to serve and advocate on behalf of a certain area in this province. Let me tell you, the health premium wasn't my first choice. I would say it was not the first choice of any of my colleagues either. Even for the Premier of this province, it was not his first choice. But when you take over on October 2, take over a government, take over a budget suffering a $5.6-billion deficit—add to it a social deficit of between $2 billion and $3 billion, which is money we owe to municipalities, boards of education and hospitals across the province—you're left without any choices. You're left without any choices unless you use some kind of measurement to live up to your promises.

Our health care in this province was suffering. It was in chaos stage. There was a shortage of doctors. About 1.2 million people in this province have no family doctor to go to. Waiting lists, waiting time to see a specialist was even longer.

I'll give you a life example from my family. My mother was suffering from some kind of medical problem—basically, her varicose veins—and wanted to have surgery. She had to wait two years to see a specialist to do the surgery. In the meantime, within two years' time, her varicose veins exploded twice. She was lucky my dad walked in the house. He found her swimming in her blood. It's not what we're looking for. It's not what the people of this province are looking for.

They're looking for good service. They're looking for good health care when they need it. It wasn't found anywhere in this province. People like my mother are like others suffering from the same problem. Some people with cancer problems have to wait to see a specialist. They're lucky if they're still alive to see that specialist; and in the other systems, people with heart disease etc, the list goes on and on.

That's what we have in this province. Besides that, we have a shortage of nurses. Nurses were leaving the province, going away, because they were mistreated by the past government, mistreated and put on a part-time, not full-time, basis. You know that you cannot raise a family working part time these days. They've been forced to work different jobs, three full-time jobs sometimes, to raise their families. Some of them decided to leave this province for other provinces, and sometimes went across the border.

Shortage of family physicians: As I mentioned, many doctors in this province won't accept new patients. At the same time, we have 2,000 foreign-trained doctors driving taxis, delivering pizzas, doing different jobs not related to their expertise. We don't know the reasons. I spoke with many of them. They passed all the required exams to be eligible to practise in this province and then they are not given permission, the chance to go to residency, which would allow them to be family physicians in this province. I was proud when I heard the Minister of Finance say in this budget that about 200 foreign-trained family physicians will be permitted, will be financed, to enter the profession in this province.

Also, our health care was suffering from lots of problems—all institutions, all buildings, all technology—and this budget will finance nine MRI and CT scanners across the province to help lower the waiting times.

Other things: They were going to hire 8,000 nurses on a full-time basis in order to deliver good service for the

great people of this province. I got the chance last week, with the Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Steve Peters, to visit one of the senior citizens' homes in my riding of London-Fanshawe. We spoke with the seniors and with management, the administration, and it felt so great when they told me that this was the first time in the last 17 years that they got an increase of 3%. Over the last 17 years, this is the only time they got a 3% increase to support their needs. The minister said, "I know 3% is not enough, but it's a good step toward increasing support for the people who work hard in their lifetime to create this beautiful province of ours."

The story goes on. The people in this province deserve great attention. They deserve great respect because they work hard for their money. They deserve good health care. They deserve a good institution and a good nursing home and good facilities, when they get old, that they can go to and get treated with respect and dignity. It's not what we heard from the news. I guess everybody heard about how much abuse was going on in many seniors' homes across the province, and about how this government stepped in and hired the honourable member Monique Smith to create a report about these institutions, about this segment of our government's responsibility. That report came after great consultation throughout the province, listening to many citizens, many senior citizens, many administrators on how to tackle the issue. All of us were astonished when we heard about the abuse that was going on in these senior citizens' homes.

1600

Also, we didn't launch the budget—because we wanted to launch a budget—without respect for the people of this province. This government started a new process that is unique in the history of Ontario: We consulted the people of this province before we launched this budget. We went from city to city and town to town holding meetings. We listened to the people of this province and what they were saying about tackling the deficit, about this budget, about how we can improve our life, how we can have a responsible government and good finances in this province.

After listening to many speakers, many constituents, many people of this province, we learned a lot. We learned about the concerns of this province. They told us they wanted good health care, good education, good social programs. They told us they wanted us to look after vulnerable people in this province. That's how the budget came about, to answer the requests of the great people of this province.

Any government, any nation, won't grow, won't prosper, won't advance unless they have a good education system. Our education in this province was suffering from a lot of problems: living in chaos, living in a war zone between parents and government, with a government that treated teachers like criminals. The three pillars of the education system were in chaos. It was a war. There was no respect from government to teachers, from teachers to parents, from parents to teachers. It was a mess. It was chaos.

This budget answers the teachers' questions. I got a chance last week to go with the Honourable Chris Bentley, the Minister of Labour, to the Catholic board of education in London. We listened to them and we announced the support this government is giving to the boards of education across this province. I listened to them. They said to us, "We're not looking for money; we're looking for respect. It's about time this government placed respect before money." That's what we're delivering. We're talking about respect. We're talking about respecting people who give their life and their time to educate our young children, to prepare this nation for the future. That's what this budget is all about: strengthening the education system and strengthening our commitment to the people of this province.

One of the most important commitments we made before the election, and delivered after the election, was the 20 students per class from kindergarten to grade 3. It was very important to lower that class size to allow teachers to give a good and proper education to our young kids.

Also, I was reading in the paper last week about a school in St Thomas, a city beside London. The school is more than 100 years old and is collapsing. They have no proper utilities, no proper classes. In the wintertime it's chaos because they have no heat, or the heat is just poorly distributed in this school. Also, in the summertime you cannot live. It's like an oven. That's not the kind of facility we're looking for in this province. As the Minister of Finance said, we live in the richest province in North America. We deserve better attention. That's why our government addressed this issue. We're going to deliver, to strengthen those schools and make sure they're equipped with the proper equipment to help our students learn more and advance in this life.

Also, I had the honour to visit Fanshawe College with our Premier last week, to talk to the teachers, the educators and the administrators in that college. As you know, Fanshawe College is one of the finest colleges in this province and delivers a very good education. But they were suffering from lack of support, lack of funding.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Did you fix that?

Mr Ramal: Definitely. We're working on it by creating good communication. When the Premier went to visit that school and listened to the concerns of the administrators and the teachers, I think that was a very good step toward fixing that situation, and also pushing our students to apprenticeship, recognizing the economic future of this province, to create talent and to create technical people fit for any growth in this future.

Let me tell you, from that visit, all the teachers and administrators were very happy. They were very pleased to listen to the Premier talking about his commitment to the education system in this province. I thank them.

I'm honoured to have the chance to speak on this budget. Hopefully, by talking more about it, it becomes very clear to all the people in this province that they can see the good in this budget. It will be the first time that

people in this province work with the government in order to reconstruct our health care, our education system, our social programs, and help us support the vulnerable people in this province.

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I just want to say what a pleasure it is to stand in this Legislature today and speak in favour of Bill 83, the centrepiece of the budget, the piece of legislation which is going to implement so many of its measures. I want to begin by publicly congratulating both the Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistant, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, for the hard work they put into this budget.

Like all members of this House, I've had a chance to be in my constituency over the last week, not only to speak with people about the budget but also to read the analysis in the newspaper and listen to the discussions on television and radio.

It's interesting that there are two views of this budget. One, which we heard today in question period—and I anticipate some of my colleagues from the Conservative Party will be raising this—is the "gotcha" view of the budget. They say that in the campaign—and this is correct—we said that we had a plan we were going to implement without asking Ontarians to pay more directly. Then our budget came out and it presented a plan which did ask Ontarians to pay a little bit more. "Gotcha," they yell, and they write their columns in the Toronto Sun and stand in question period, but what's interesting is that their analysis begins and ends there. That's their entire analysis. It's what I like to call the "gotcha" budget.

Then there's another way to look at the budget, and I'd like to take a few minutes this afternoon to outline that. I go back to the recent election campaign, a campaign where I knocked, as did many of my colleagues, on literally thousands of doors. What we heard from the people of Ontario is that they were in trouble. They were in trouble because our services, principally health care and education, were failing. We heard about overcrowded, crumbling classrooms. We heard about textbook shortages. We heard about low standardized test scores. Morale in the classroom had reached an all-time low, as we had a government which had declared war on our teachers.

1610

I had the pleasure, as an alumni, to visit my old elementary school. I entered that school in 1970. I went to the library, and the same carpet was there that had been there since 1970. Last year or the year before, they had thrown out a book entitled Some Day Man Will Reach the Moon. We laugh, but it's sad. This was the state of their education system.

Then we have health care. In my community, we're crippled by a shortage of family doctors. We have long line-ups at emergency rooms. We have tremendous waits for major surgery. Yet, at the same time, we have a recognition among voters—because the voters have a certain wisdom that I don't think we always recognize—that health care is a bit of a black hole. They want to know that any money, any additional funds we put into that will go to repair the system.

We came forward and said, "We want to govern in a different way." We had a Conservative government that had been in power for eight years, and we had been governed by an agenda that talked about tax cuts—mainly to the well-off and to corporations. We had a government that had starved our essential services of funding. We had a government with a lack of ambition. Their ambition was about Ontario having a lower tax rate than Mississippi. Once again, that was the beginning, middle and end of what they were—

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): A race to the bottom.

Mr Milloy: A race to the bottom.

We're not opposed to low taxes. We're not opposed to balanced budgets. In fact, we follow them. What we want, though, is to have taxes that reflect the true cost. What we said in the election campaign is that, first of all, we'd cancel the proposed Tory tax cuts. We put forward an independent plan which had been looked at and verified by an independent auditor. We put forward a plan where we would cut the Tory tax cuts, where we would take that money and invest it in services, to try to respond to the people of Ontario. That plan was checked and rechecked. We had forensic accountants, we had economists. It was a workable plan. But our mistake was that we based that plan on the public figures that had been put forward by the previous government.

Mr Yakabuski: You should have trusted Gerry Phillips.

Mr Milloy: He talks about trust. He says we should have trusted Gerry Phillips. You know what? We trusted Mr Eves, the then Premier of this province.

On May 6—I keep this in my desk—I have an excerpt from Hansard where the Premier stood up and gave some interesting quotes. He told this House—and he gave these quotes with references—"On September 22, on CHRO, then-Premier Eves said, 'No, we will not be running a deficit this year.' On Global TV on September 27, a few days before the election, he said, 'We will balance this year.' CKVR, on September 30, he said, 'We will balance this year.' Then, during the course of the leaders' debate, right in the thick of the campaign, he"—this is Mr Eves—"told the people of Ontario, 'There won't be a deficit this year.'"

At the same time, they put forward a document called The Road Ahead, which contained $10.3 billion in promises. But what was interesting was, we had put our plan out for independent verification; the Conservatives refused. They didn't need auditors and forensic accountants to come in.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): They don't like auditors.

Mr Milloy: No, they don't like auditors.

We won the election. Remember, going back to the beginning of my remarks, what it was about? It was about health care and education. It was about eight years

of neglect. We went out to the people of this province and said, "We're going to be preparing our first budget. Tell us what this budget should be about." Not surprisingly, they reaffirmed exactly what they had told us in the election. They said, "Fix the services," and to do it in a way that holds us accountable.

But we had a problem. Despite the words we heard from the former Premier, the leader of the Conservative Party, when we called in the former Provincial Auditor to do a verification, we found a $5.6-billion deficit. All of us, as Liberals, have had to put up for years and years with how the Conservatives were great fiscal managers. But you know what we found out? We found out that the emperor had no clothes. We found out that there was a $5.6-billion shortfall.

We had a mandate. The mandate was to fix health care and education. We had a purpose: to go in and start to reinvest in those services, and we had to do it in a fiscally responsible way. So we developed a plan. First of all, we said we would have a four-year plan, which would give a multi-year overview and bring some sanity to budgeting and forecasting. Second, we said we would balance the budget. We'd do it in a gradual way so we didn't hit those who were most vulnerable, to allow us the room to address those services. Next, we put our own fiscal house in order.

Our budget holds the line on spending. It restricts program increases to 1.9% a year over the next four years and outlines targets for cost savings. The budgets of 15 ministries are either flatlined or decreased. I ask you to compare that with previous provincial budgets. Between 2000 and 2003-04, provincial program spending increased by 22%, far exceeding tax revenues, which actually declined by 0.6% during that period. At the same time, we've asked the Chair of Management Board to find further savings and efficiencies every year.

Interjection: Then they had the Belinda budget.

Mr Milloy: The Belinda budget.

Then we asked Ontarians to contribute. What Ontarians have told me over and over again is that they will contribute for better services if they believe, first of all, we will be able to deliver those services and deliver them in a fiscally responsible way. It was a hard decision by this government, but it was a decision about fulfilling our mandate. It was a decision about going forward as a government with what we had been elected to do.

I began my remarks talking about the "gotcha" budget. I always ask people—when you read and hear some of the analysis, it's almost like they're saying, "You introduced health care premiums so you could get a raise." None of us in this Legislature is getting a raise. In fact, our cabinet colleagues will be taking a pay cut. We're asking people to contribute to the health care system so we can fix it. That's one of the reasons we brought forward a premium. One hundred per cent—every cent—will go to fixing our system.

What else are we going to do through this budget? We're going to budget for results. We'll have a constant review of our programs and priorities and ask ourselves, "Could it be done better?" We, as a government, are going to be establishing benchmarks so that four years from now we can go to the people of this province with a real report card and say, "This is the progress we've made in health care. This is the progress we've made in education."

Let's just take a look at a few of the investments we are making, in the few minutes I have left. Take health care, for example. Rather than continuing to throw money into a black hole, we established targets for a variety of improvements to our services. We've made key investments in more efficient and cost-effective areas of our system, such as primary care and home care. We've invested in public health in an effort to keep people out of our hospitals and health care facilities.

The budget delivers an additional 36,000 cardiac procedures, 9,000 cataract surgeries and another 2,300 joint replacements each and every year. We're investing more than $600 million to support and reform primary care by opening up 150 new family health teams and boosting funding to our 54 existing community health centres. We'll be providing home care to an additional 95,700 Ontarians by the year 2007-08 and an additional investment of $406 million a year to our long-term-care facilities.

In education, we're investing some $2.6 billion, meeting the Rozanski requirement to make sure our kids get the type of education they deserve.

Standing here as the member from Kitchener Centre, I'd be remiss not to talk about infrastructure. The budget outlines a series of ambitious targets in terms of our public infrastructure. To the people in my region, one of the big priorities is a light rail transit system. A few days before the budget, and as was outlined in the budget, our government came forward to announce support for the next step in this ambitious program. We'll be funding one third of an environmental assessment study which, if it proceeds, I'm optimistic will result in about two years from now in all three levels of government coming forward to see it proceed. This is the type of vision that my community likes. This is the type of sound investment this government is making in this budget.

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So much about the last eight years has been taking away. It's been going into a system and slowly draining it. It's time for us to reinvest. I talked to people in my constituency over the last week. What they told me is that they want a government that's responsible. They want a government that will go forward and address their types of priorities. They're concerned about their schools and their health care system. What we've done is come forward with some ambition for a change. We've come forward and said, "Let's invest in these areas. Let's establish some benchmarks of what we want to see succeed, and let's move forward."

I think that one of the most important things is that at the end of the four years, as I mentioned, we'll have a report card. But also at the end of the four years, in a piece of legislation, a companion piece to Bill 83—we're

going to be bringing forward an act which is going to invite the Provincial Auditor to take a look at our books and make sure that what we present to the Ontario people is 100% accurate, so that four or five years from now we don't have a situation of a budget coming forward, after an election, where we say, "Oops, I'm sorry. We had $5.6 billion that we forgot to tell you about," and so we don't have parties going into an election campaign saying, "Here's our program based on the money we find in the public accounts, or the figures that are in the public accounts," but we find out afterwards that they're inaccurate.

People want government to be responsible. People want government to invest, and invest wisely. That's what this budget's about, and that's the approach this government has taken.

I support Bill 83. I support this budget. I think it's going to lay the foundation for a strong Ontario to start the rebuilding we were elected on last October.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I think one of the things we want to try to get across to the people of Ontario is that this budget is a transformation budget. Our health care system is not just about spending and investing more money; it's about breaking down the silos and the barriers that exist between hospitals, communities, doctors, nurses, long-term care facilities and home care. We've got too many divisions, too many silos that don't talk to each other. We need to transform health care. If we don't transform it, we're going to be doomed with longer waiting times for cardiac surgery.

Many of you members know that we get the calls in the office from mothers, literally crying, saying, "I've got my 31-year-old daughter, with two children, who's just been diagnosed with breast cancer, and I can't get her any chemotherapy. What can I do?" Those are the calls we're responding to in this budget.

I know it's important to have the eye test at the optometrist's, and I know it's important to go to the chiropractor, but this is a budget where we're trying to make some realistic, tough choices, of saying there are people who are lingering in pain for two years waiting for a hip replacement. Those calls are coming to our office and have been coming for years. It's getting worse.

The condition of our nursing homes is deplorable. We had the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health go across the province. She can tell you the horror stories in the nursing homes. The opponents of this budget say, "Well, never mind that." Well, we are minding the nursing homes, because our seniors deserve dignity in nursing homes. They deserve a bath more than once a week. They deserve a nursing home that doesn't have rodents running through it—I got a call last week about that. We're putting $190 million into nursing home care. We're making sure there's a nurse on hand.

Yes, nurses. We've had nurses thrown out of our hospitals in the last number of years. We're trying to bring them back with this budget. We don't have enough nurses at the bedside of sick people. We have an immunization program in this province that basically doesn't allow for the immunization of poor people.

I know that Minister Smitherman was at a hospital, and the pediatrician walked up to the minister and said, "Can I give you a hug, Mr Smitherman?" This is a pediatrician. He said, "By allowing children to get immunizations for chicken pox, meningitis and pneumonia, you've done more with the stroke of a pen than I've done in 37 years as a pediatrician." That's what a pediatrician told the Minister of Health. Another pediatrician at Jane and Finch said, "Finally I can offer families that come into my office immunization. I couldn't before." Which family, in some of the poorer areas of this province, can afford $600 to immunize a child?

In this budget, there's going to be $600 as a result of paying a bit more through premiums, making these services available. So it's not just about all the negative things you hear about a budget. This budget is an investment in transforming our health care system.

If you look at seniors, there's a baby boom bubble coming where there will be more seniors. We're going to have to start to get smarter in how we provide health care for seniors. One senior phoned me up and said that there's nothing in the budget for seniors. I said, "Well, wait a minute. I think that out of the $30 billion spent on health care, half—$15 billion—goes to people 65 years of age and over." They need that first-quality health care. God bless them, they're living longer, but we have to make sure they don't live longer in pain and in dirty conditions in nursing homes, without the hip replacement, without the proper cardiac treatment they need. So we have to have more revenue to give seniors the dignity they deserve in health care. Again, half of the health care budget goes to people 65 years of age and over—$15 billion out of $30 billion—but we're going to need more, because we're getting a demographic bubble coming through. We're going to need more than we have, so we're telling the people of Ontario to pay a little bit more—and I know it's painful, but it's the reality we face—because this is a very good health system that needs transformation.

We can sit on our hands and talk about more tax cuts, as the last government did, or we can promise to have the lowest tax jurisdiction in North America or the world. What good is that to a senior who needs that hip replacement? What good is that to a child who needs that immunization for meningitis? It's no darned good at all. What good is a tax cut to that person living in a rat-infested nursing home? No good at all.

This is not just about numbers; it's about people who need better quality health care. It's about cancer care. We need to give that speedy treatment to people with cancer. It's about cardiac care. It's about creating good places for nurses to work—another 8,000 nurses. It's about transforming this province with family health teams. There are too many people in this province without family doctors. We're going to, with this budget, create 150 new family health teams to help 167,000 real people. It's not just numbers; it's people.

If you pick up the right-wing rags in this province, you'll never hear about this item in the budget: that we're

going to create 150 new health teams; that there will be 95,000 more people who are going to get home care—95,000 more people serviced with home care. That's $440 million more for home care. You'll never hear the Conservatives talk about the fact that this is in the budget. Do they care about home care or not?

Do they care about the fact that we're also going to be doing something very important in terms of our schools? Our schools are in a very, very difficult state. We're giving them $2.1 billion. That's not only going to buildings; it's going to children—the buildings will get some help too, which you know they need.

That's why we are saying that this money in this budget goes primarily to help people, whether you're in a nursing home, a school and you need special education—it's for children and it's for seniors.

1630

One of things, again, you won't read in the right-wing rags is that there is a property tax enhancement for seniors of low and moderate income. Whether you're a tenant or a homeowner, there is going to be $85 million more this year to help seniors deal with property taxes.

As you know, in this budget, too, we have frozen property taxes on commercial. Right across the province there is no increase. On education, the province has also frozen that. There are no increases in this budget for property taxes. You'll never hear the Conservatives talk about that.

Also, once and for all we're going to clean up that Conservative mess called MPAC. A lot of people don't understand it, unless you maybe owned a sugar bush in Ontario this last year. MPAC is the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. Next year, we're saying, "Let's fix MPAC." There will be no reassessment next year. We're going to clean up the mess at MPAC that has been essentially out of control. The lack of control over property assessments was a result of the last government, which basically created the most monstrous property tax legislation in the civilized world. We're beginning to clean it up. No reassessments next year. We're going to change the cycle so there's some sanity to it. We're going to give people time to actually appeal—they're actually going to be able to appeal their taxes—and get reconsideration. So there's going to be reform of the assessment system, the mess that this last government created in assessment, the assessment nightmare of Ernie Eves and company.

There are also little things; there are nuggets in this budget. For instance, farmers who worked their whole life—and I know the Conservatives don't care about what's happening in rural Ontario, but there are people struggling on farms throughout Ontario, and they will be able to pass on their farms to their family without paying land transfer tax. I think that's a good thing to do. Also, if you live in a life-lease situation—there are over 70,000 life-lease apartments all over Ontario—they will also be exempt from land transfer tax. That saves them about $1,200 each.

So there are things that help people again this year, because of the money we gave the Toronto Transit Commission and that we're giving transit commissions all over Ontario for building, like Kitchener-Waterloo, Ottawa—we believe in public transit. And you'll never hear the right wing talk about the fact that we're going to start to give part of the gas tax to cities for transit. In October this year, we're giving $150 million as part of the gas tax to municipalities, so that this year in Toronto we didn't have a fare increase. That also affects real people. There is no fare increase in Toronto, thanks to this budget.

There are good things in this budget that you'll never hear the right wing talk about, because there are very few tax cuts. The only tax cuts in here are—we're removing some taxes that are job killers. The capital tax, which is basically a tax on everything that moves, is being phased out. But generally speaking, it's an investment in people. It's a commitment to the fact that if we don't reaffirm our long-term—

Interjection: Commitment.

Mr Colle: Not necessarily; it's a long-term vision, really, of saying that public health care is good, public schools are good and our cities are also good. We need to make a long-term commitment of money to them, and this budget is not about one year; it's about a four-year plan to fix our schools.

That's what people said during the election. Over and over again, when I knocked on doors in Eglinton-Lawrence, they didn't talk about, "Give me tax cuts;" they said, "Give me a good school for my child. Give me a good nursing home for my grandfather. Give me a good health care system so that when I have the cardiac surgery I need, I can go there in a timely fashion. Give my daughter the chemotherapy she needs." That's what this budget is all about. We can't afford to keep on saying to people, "Wait for the chemotherapy. Wait for the cardiac surgery. Wait for the hip replacement." We're telling seniors, "You've got to wait a year and a half for that cataract operation." This budget will enable us to at least get that speeded up so there's going to be more cardiac care, but also cataract operations in a timely fashion for seniors.

These are things that this budget tries to do in a fashion that sometimes people object to, because they say, "Well, we don't want to pay for it."

I know people do pay enough income tax, but just remember, despite what you hear from the right wing, if someone does earn $24,000, they have to pay $240 a year in a premium. If they earn $36,500, they pay $425 in a premium. If they earn $48,500, it's $575, and so on. So generally speaking, the more you make, the more you pay in this premium. I know our NDP compadres—the hearings are all across the province. They kept on telling us—I know the member from East York heard them: "We don't mind paying a bit more in taxes if we get better health care and better education." That's what this budget does. So, at what point—

Interjections.

Mr Colle: Now all of a sudden the NDP are saying, "We didn't really mean that." They all said, "We don't

mind paying a bit more to get better health care and better education and better cities."

So we're improving health care in the nursing homes. Public health: We're uploading it to the province. We're now going to cover 75%. That's what we're doing. We can't afford to play Russian roulette with another SARS outbreak. We can't download public health any longer. We're uploading it so the province is going to pay 75% of public health, because we can't afford another SARS in this province.

This is a good budget. It's tough, but it's fair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Questions and comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's always a pleasure to rise on a leadoff on Mr Sorbara's bill. Of course, we're looking forward to a lot of debate on this particular piece of legislation. We think that this bill, this motion and the budget in general have a lot of problems.

We certainly heard that in the last few days. We had last week off—constituency week. Over and over again—I probably met 1,500 people last week, and I can tell you, there weren't a lot of people happy with the budget. I understand now that Mr Paul Martin's not happy either. How this will affect this federal campaign, who knows, but definitely there are a lot of issues around the budget, particularly around the health premium. We think that there are some concerns there, because it may, in fact—although there's more money maybe for some areas in health care, services have been cut in other areas.

Our main concern is that it will impact the economy, because working families won't have as much money in their pockets. With that, I think we have concerns. We listened to people like Mr Cordiano talk about the economic benefits and how great Ontario is, and we agree with that. But the fact of the matter is that we have to keep creating those jobs. People need to have a lot more disposable income to do that, and this budget actually takes that away. Those are the concerns we have, along with the fact that, of course, you didn't campaign on health premiums and that sort of thing. That's an area that the 12 million people of Ontario will determine in the next provincial election, and maybe even have an impact on the federal election, which we'll see over the next four weeks.

With that, I thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It's fun to listen to the Liberals defending their budget. I think you guys should go out and defend it at the doorsteps and help your federal members to explain to them how misunderstood you are. You need to explain to them all the nuggets of gold that are in this budget. I'm telling you, you've got to get out there. Otherwise people are not going to understand the budget and they're going to hate you for the wrong reason. You don't want that, for God's sake. Just get out there and defend the nuggets.

1640

I am telling you, this budget is nothing at all to be proud of. They are whacking working poor people with this budget, with this premium. When you earn 20,000 bucks and you get whacked with $300, and they say it's progressive, I'm telling you, that's indefensible. That's why they are not going to the doors. A millionaire pays 900 bucks. Mike Colle has stopped at 50,000 bucks, where people are paying $500. He didn't go on to say what a millionaire pays. At $20,000, you pay 300 bucks; if you earn $1 million, you pay 900 bucks.

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): Calm down, Rosario. You're going to burst.

Mr Marchese: Oh, no, I'm not going to burst, David. You guys are going to burst, not me. In fact, I'm enjoying myself. I am.

Mr Zimmer: I can tell.

Mr Marchese: Yes. I want you, David, to go to your seat and defend this. And do it calmly. Don't scream at your friends. You've got to do it calmly. Convince people that you're doing the right thing.

This is a budget that's going to hurt a whole lot of people. This premium is not progressive. A millionaire pays 900 bucks. If you earn $20,000, you can barely pay your bills. You can't even pay your rent with 20,000 bucks. You're going to get whacked with 300 bucks, and he says it's progressive. I'm telling you, David, you better go and defend it.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): Please forgive my voice. I'm in the middle of allergy season.

Having said that, the member from Trinity-Spadina has brought me to a different point that I want to make. I want to make it quite clear that people with individual taxable incomes of $20,000 and under will not be paying any of the premium whatsoever.

Clarification is absolutely necessary, because when people have this misinformation we get those telephone calls saying, "Somebody told me they were taking my eyeglasses away from me." They're saying, "Why are you taking glasses away from my children?" So they're not informed enough. Maybe we are guilty of something, not making sure that people understand the details exactly. I want to be sure that people understand this.

In my riding, people are very happy. I want to hear the people on the other side—

Interjections.

Mr Levac: They're happy about something that I want to make sure people understand. We are moving on brownfields. Brownfields are a very important issue in my riding, where we have 150 acres that need to be redeveloped. We're going to be putting some things forward to do that.

The other important thing I want to make a point about is that we have nine MRIs and CT scanners that are going to be put into the province. Our riding has the spot that we believe is the right place for it. We're making the case for it. We believe we can get an MRI out of that.

I want to ask the members on the other side to explain why the Ontario Chamber of Commerce is giving the budget a B+. Maybe they are wrong too. The reality is, we had to make some tough choices, choices that are disturbing people. When we have those choices to make, I want to make the point clearly and carefully that when

we look at the other side of the choices made, we understand that the people who are waiting for cataract replacements or hip replacements, the people who are waiting to have their ankles and hands moved so they can once again, through our health care system, improve their status of life, will say, "You know what? I'll take those hips," and understand that.

Mr Yakabuski: I'm certainly sorry to hear that the member from Brant is suffering from allergies. I hope things get better but, unfortunately, probably by next year the government will delist that medication. He's not the only one who is suffering from allergies. Apparently, Paul Martin is suffering from allergies too. He's become very allergic to the presence of Dalton McGuinty.

Mr Marchese: You're kidding?

Mr Yakabuski: Oh, I'm not kidding, Rosario. He doesn't want to have anything to do with Dalton McGuinty. He'd like for Dalton McGuinty to go on a foreign vacation. He'd like for people to forget the word "McGuinty." On top of that, Dalton McGuinty's own brother David McGuinty, running federally in Ottawa South, seems to have caught that allergy bug. He doesn't want his brother coming around to help him. "No, no, you're very busy," he says. "You're the Premier of the most populous, prosperous province in this country. Please stay on the job. They need you. I'll get along without you here in Ottawa South. I swear, somehow by hook or by"—you know what—"I'm going to get elected without your help, big brother." So he's developed those allergies too.

The whole province is developing these allergies to Dalton McGuinty. Where his popularity was soaring in October, it's gotten very, very meagre as we approach the month of June.

Mr Marchese: John, there's a vaccination for allergies now.

Mr Yakabuski: There is. Yes, it's called a referendum. My colleague Frank Klees is pushing that referendum. If we could have that referendum, the people of the province of Ontario could be cured of their allergic reaction to this budget, this budget that has some of them lying awake at night.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Eglinton-Lawrence for response.

Mr Colle: First of all, I just want to correct the misinformation. On $20,000 you pay not one cent in premiums. On $21,000 you pay $60. OK? Also, a person earning a million dollars in the province of Ontario pays $400,000 in income tax, which includes a surtax on health—which is still there. But the NDP will not mention that.

But what I want to talk about, is that—oh yes, someone mentioned the economic impact of spending money on health, for instance. In Hamilton, the number one employer is the Hamilton Health Sciences Centre. So if I'm hiring nurses, if the government is buying MRI machines, if we're getting better care in nursing homes, I think that stays in the economy. I don't think it goes to the Cayman Islands like the tax cuts did. It stays here in Ontario. It stays in Hamilton.

So this budget is really to see where you stand. Are you just willing to talk about better health care, schools or cities? Are you in favour of shorter waiting lists for cardiac care or cataract operations? Are you in favour of really hiring back those nurses, or just paying lip service that you want the nurses back? You just can't wish the nurses back. You have to actually pay for the nurses, folks.

What about the family health teams? Are you in favour of having doctors in rural communities or are you not? Are you just in favour of talking about it? Are you in favour of better home care or do you just want to talk about better home care? Are you in favour of new long-term care beds or do you just want to talk about the beds? What about immunization for children who can't afford it? Are you for that or do you just want to talk about it?

This budget doesn't just talk about it. It has a four-year plan to do something about fixing our hospitals, schools and cities. We're doing the right thing. It's a tough thing. We don't just talk about it, we're doing something.

Mr Dunlop: Mr Speaker, can we have unanimous consent to stand down our leadoff time please?

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Yes, there is.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to participate in debate on Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget Measures. I have to say that contrary to the member from Trinity-Spadina, who earlier in his debate said that he's rather enjoying this, I'm not enjoying this at all. The fact of the matter is that right across this province people are not enjoying this. The reason they're not enjoying it is because they are reeling from the effects of a government that has presented in this place a budget that is contrary to a commitment that was made by the leader of that party—now the Premier—running in an election.

I've just come from a week of traveling across the province. I can tell you that whether it was in Ottawa or Cornwall, whether my meetings took place in Kingston, Belleville or Brockville, whether I was in Trenton or, more recently, in York region and Toronto, there is a very consistent thought on the minds of Ontarians. The thought is that they don't know what to do with what has just been done to them. They thought that they had a commitment that was made to them by a political party. The commitment was very clear: It was that there would not be an increase in taxes.

1650

Now, we hear from the members of the government—and I know that these are the words they're being told to say by their scriptwriters and by people in the Premier's office and by people in the Minister of Finance's office in terms of how to sell this budget when they get back to their constituencies. But I can also hear—in fact, I even heard it in question period today, in the voice of the finance minister, who typically is very confident about his position. When we look at how the Minister of Finance conducted himself today in question period, it's very clear that the message is getting through to him, and

I have no doubt that he has heard it from his own backbenchers in his caucus meetings. I'm sure that he's hearing from his cabinet ministers that they are on very, very shaky ground here. What is at stake is not the details of the budget but the integrity of this government, the integrity of the Premier, the integrity of an entire group of individuals who I believe had good intentions, who had no idea that their leader, the Premier of this province, was willing to arrogantly break his promise and then arrogantly break the law by bringing into this House a budget that would be in contradiction of a commitment that he made to uphold a piece of legislation that he voted for in this House, and that's called the Taxpayer Protection Act.

Under the Taxpayer Protection Act, no government, no minister of the government, can table for first reading in this House any legislation that would call for a tax increase without first going to the people of Ontario through a referendum; in other words, getting the mandate of the people of this province to in fact increase those taxes. That legislation was brought forward by our government, the previous government. The purpose of that bill was to ensure that there would be accountability and good stewardship on the part of the provincial government; that if we're to go back to people in this province and ask for more of their hard-earned dollars by way of taxes, we would first consult with them and say, "Here is what we want to do. Here is why we need the additional tax dollars. We need your endorsement."

Mr McGuinty voted for that legislation. It's in place in this province today. The reality is that not only has Mr McGuinty now broken his promise to the people of Ontario that he would not do that, but he has gone one step further, and this is what Ontarians are even more concerned about than that original broken promise. It's the fact that we now have a government that is placing itself above the law. We have a government now in Ontario that effectively is saying to people in this province, "It doesn't matter what the law says. We will do what we choose to do, and, by the way, notwithstanding what the law states very clearly, we, having the authority of government and a majority of the number of seats in this Legislature, will introduce legislation that will actually change the law so that what we're doing now is in fact legal."

If every criminal in this province or in this country had the option to do that, wouldn't that be interesting? If the boys at Enron had the opportunity to say, "Oh, by the way, you know, we broke the law. We're doing something or we did something that was in fact in contradiction to statutes in place. But after the fact, here is what we'll do: We'll just change the law and legitimatize what we did."

In no uncertain terms, that's precisely what this government is doing. That's what people right across this province are angry about. They will not let this government forget. Unless members individually stand up and are prepared to object to what their leadership, their Minister of Finance, their Premier, perhaps others on the front bench are willing to do so arrogantly, unless they stand up and say, "As an individual member of the Legislature I am prepared to say no," they will take on to themselves the same guilt that right now is being carried by the Premier and by the Minister of Finance.

To that end, I introduced a piece of legislation in the House today. It is a private member's bill. This bill is intended to give us in the Legislature an opportunity to do the right thing, notwithstanding what the government has done. This bill will effectively affirm the Taxpayer Protection Act. For the benefit of members and of those who are interested in this issue, I would like to read into the record the preamble of this bill that sets out very clearly why it's important that this Legislature take action. The preamble reads as follows:

"On September 11, 2003, Dalton McGuinty, before his election as Premier, signed a written pledge 'not to raise taxes or implement a new tax without the explicit consent of the voters' through a referendum as required by the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999. He also stated publicly that a government led by him would comply with the act.

"The Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999 protects taxpayers by prohibiting a member of the executive council from including in a bill a provision that increases a tax rate or establishes a new tax unless, before the bill is introduced, a referendum is held to authorize the provision.

"On May 18, 2004, the Minister of Finance in Premier McGuinty's government introduced Bill 83"—this is the bill we're debating today—"(An Act to implement budget measures) to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999 to create an exception for that prohibition so that a bill can be introduced to include the following two taxes." One of those taxes is the health premium that we discussed today.

"For many reasons, it is vital for the government of Ontario to comply with the Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, as it read on May 17, 2004, the day before" this bill "was introduced" for first reading.

The preamble of my bill sets out those reasons. I'd like to share those with you and with people across this province. "Those reasons include protecting the right of the taxpayers of Ontario to receive government that is fiscally prudent...." I don't think it's too much to ask that people across this province have the right to expect prudent government and government that is "accountable to them and ensuring the integrity of the political process, whereby the government of Ontario keeps its promises on fiscal matters except if it receives the permission of the electorate to change them." That's what is at issue here. "Restricting new taxes and tax increases helps to ensure the well-being of the Ontario economy and to preserve Ontario's economic competitiveness."

1700

This bill, which I urge all members of the Legislature to support, will effectively force the Premier, force this government, to do what they said they would do, and that is to at least honour the taxpayers in this province with the opportunity to vote in a referendum on any tax in-

creases. I also would expect, and I hope, that the Premier would allow his members to have a free vote on this issue so they can at least protect their own integrity.

Bill 83, the budget that's under consideration here, is an absolute attack on people across this province. Whether it's through the health premium or through the delisting of chiropractic services or physiotherapy services or eye testing, it is an affront to the people of this province.

To begin a process in this Legislature, to give voice to people across the province, I introduced a petition that is starting to come in from all across this province. This petition has now been in circulation for no longer than five days. It's available on my Web site. People are downloading it right across the province. This is just an example: literally thousands of signatures on this petition in just a few short days. Contrary to the member from Brant, who said in his debate that people who reside in his riding are happy with this budget, I say to the member that we have numerous constituents from Brant who have signed this and they are not happy; they are not at all happy. This petition effectively challenges the government, challenges Mr McGuinty, to keep the law. This is a petition to force Premier McGuinty to obey the Taxpayer Protection Act.

It reads:

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the taxpayer protection law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11 ... not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum;...

"... the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario" to at least give the people of Ontario an opportunity to have a say.

So we will do through this House, and I as a member of the Legislature, what we can to at least hold this government's feet to the fire to do the right thing and to respect the law of this province.

I'm not the only one who is concerned about it.

The Ontario Taxpayers Federation today put out a release indicating that they are taking action through the courts. They are filing a lawsuit today against this government on the same premise, that what they're doing is in fact illegal, and to simply, through this legislation, create for government a loophole so it can justify what they're doing today illegally being legal tomorrow. Even the taxpayers' federation and the literally hundreds of thousands of people who support the good work of the taxpayers' federation are joining in this campaign.

Linda Leatherdale from the Toronto Sun is joining this battle in her column. She's urging her readers to get involved in this campaign.

The National Post, through the Financial Post, is taking up this battle. Why? Because they understand that what is at stake here is the very integrity of government.

How can we in this place simply passively accept that government can do this to taxpayers at will without putting up the appropriate and necessary resistance? We'll put up that resistance, and I know that the members opposite, who are in the government today and have the opportunity to speak out, feel as I do at the unjustness, and they cannot justify what has taken place. There are members of the back bench—

Mr Marchese: Tories for the poor.

Mr Klees: I understand that the member from Trinity-Spadina is concerned about this issue, and rightfully so. While we don't agree on a lot, because we have a very different view of the world, quite frankly, on this point we can actually join and go arm in arm in protest against this government. I know that even cabinet ministers have serious concerns about this, because when they went back to their constituents last week, during constituency week, I know they had calls and e-mails and people coming into their constituency offices saying, "What are you doing? Why are you betraying us? Why are you attacking us?"

In fact, the member from Prince Edward-Hastings was on a call-in show. He himself, as a backbencher and a member of the government, said, "You know, I disagree with this." In fact, his call to action was—and I hope he's right. In fact, I plan on putting this to the government tomorrow. The member of the backbench said, "This is something that I believe we can deal with in committee, and the government will reverse its position in committee." Isn't that interesting? I'm going to be very interested to see how that works and whether or not the Minister of Finance and the Premier will be willing to put this matter to the standing committee and truly allow their backbenchers to vote freely on this if in fact that's how they feel.

We have before us a bill that, in detail, is breaking trust with the people of Ontario. Even the Prime Minister today made it very clear that what the Premier of this province has done is unacceptable. Even the Prime Minister today said that no one in politics should make a promise they cannot keep. His quotation today is that any promise made by a politician should be made to take account of unexpected circumstances.

This government claims a deficit and justifies their breaking of the law, their breaking of the trust, on the basis of a deficit that, had they gotten to work here in this place the day they were elected, they would not have had. They had months to deal with that. There were efficiencies they could have found.

The people of Ontario are tired of your excuses. Government is not elected to give people excuses; government is elected to enact good government. You have failed to do that. This government has failed the people of this province and they will pay for it.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is always a pleasure to listen to my friend from Oak Ridges. He is right; we don't often agree on many things. I want to start off with what we don't agree on, and that is his whole reliance upon the Taxpayer Protection Act. I would give much more credence and credibility to that act and to the member had the Conservatives followed the Taxpayer Protection Act in their own term in office. We need to

remember that the last year they were in office, they flouted their own act, the act they had brought in and which they had constantly spoken in favour of. They went right around the act.

I do not expect that this government is going to do anything except go around this act too, so don't start hollering too much against the Tories, because you're going to do exactly the same thing. The reason you are going to do it is that this act, from its inception, was fundamentally flawed. No act of a previous government can bind the actions of a future government. You're not going to be bound by this act, even though you, as Liberals, sitting on this side of the House, voted with the Tories for the act when it came in. I want to remind you that you did that too, but the whole act is flawed, and let's get around that.

1710

The reality, and where I do agree with him, is that you made specific promises during the election which the electorate expected you to keep. Front and centre in all of those was the now-Premier standing there saying, "I will not raise your taxes. I won't lower them, but I won't raise them either." That is what people remember. That's viscerally what they remember from the election and why I think many of you, if you are out there knocking on doors for your federal cousins, will see that that appears to me, at least in Ontario, to be the number one issue.

I only have two minutes, so I can't say much more. I disagree with the solution, but the premise upon which the solution is based is absolutely right.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): First of all, I'd like to begin by correcting some of the misinformation that was put forth by the MPP from Oak Ridges, despite his being always eloquent, always well groomed and perhaps ready to take up the leadership challenge of his party. He referred to the MPP from Brant as being particularly gleeful and happy. I'd like to set the record clear that the citizens of the riding of Brant, ably represented by the Honourable Dave Levac, were actually referring particularly to the fact that this government is moving forward by putting a new MRI facility in that area, as well as some of the movement we're making on the brownfield legislation and taking care of that particular issue.

Also, I'd like to bring to your attention, Mr Speaker, and the people who are listening, the idea of breaking trust. Frankly, the underlying philosophy of the former Tory-led government was divesting Ontarians of all the assets that we hold dear, whether it's the 407, our health care system, the educational sector, our highways, hydro etc. This is really, I think, a fundamental change that we in Ontario are trying to put forth with the McGuinty vision: We don't consider these assets profit centres to be exploited, to be sold off, to be syndicated, to be privatized in the way the previous government did.

Very briefly, as a physician, I can tell you that I am especially pleased to see the massive commitment we are making toward orthopaedic procedures, joint replacements, cardiac procedures, cataracts and dialysis. These are issues that have been burning for more than a decade. The Conservative approach was essentially to invite American-style corporations to take up profit centres here; ours is not.

Mr Yakabuski: It's always a pleasure for me to follow my colleague from Oak Ridges. The concern I have is why people in this province are so angry and why there are so many thousands of names already assembled on petitions. It is not about the details of the Taxpayer Protection Act; it is the fact that the Premier of Ontario, while he was the opposition leader, on September 11 last year during an election campaign, made the conscious decision to say, "I support the Taxpayer Protection Act."

It wasn't something that he voted on a couple of years ago and the situation had changed or circumstances had changed. Under questioning by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, "Do you intend to follow this act? Do you intend to abide by the rules of the Taxpayer Protection Act if elected? Will you do that, Mr McGuinty?" he said yes and signed that pledge. That is why the people of Ontario are so angry and upset. Dalton McGuinty didn't say, "I'm going to fix health care and education, but I'm going to empty your pockets to do so." He said, "I'm going to give you the health care you need when you need it; the education your children need when they need it; the services you need when you need them. We're going to do that while respecting the Taxpayer Protection Act, and we will not run a deficit in this province."

Well, Dalton McGuinty didn't tell the you-know-what. He broke his promise. That's what angers people in this province. They will forgive a lot of things, but they will not forgive someone who breaks their promise. That will be borne out in the next provincial election.

Mr Marchese: I want to clarify what similarities we have with the Tories, and differences.

Mr Yakabuski: Arm in arm, Rosario, arm in arm.

Mr Marchese: It's not quite like that. What I think he meant is this: Tories have principles on the right, quite true; New Democrats have principles on the left, and that is true.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Like the social contract.

Mr Marchese: Where he and I agree, Duncan, is that we don't know where the Liberals stand. That's what I think he meant. Tories are here, New Democrats here and Liberals are all over the map. Is that correct?

Mr Klees: That's good.

Mr Marchese: That's what I thought.

On the issue of where we differ, do you remember when you cut assistance to welfare recipients by about 22%? I thought that was a serious blow to the poor. I thought it was. But I like to hear Frank say there's an element of "Repent, sinner" kind of politics, where he now is concerned about the poor—God bless, I think it's good. Where New Democrats are on this issue is that when you tax someone with a premium and he's only earning $20,000 plus one cent, in the next couple of years, he'll be paying 300 bucks.

Interjection: Sixty dollars.

Mr Marchese: Show me that document. Where is that document?

Interjection: Right there.

Mr Marchese: "The plan is fully rolled out in 2005-06. The government will implement OHIP premiums as follows: $300 for individuals earning between $20,000 and $36,000." Come on. What's he talking about? A poor individual earning 20,000 bucks gets whacked for 300 bucks; a millionaire, 900 bucks. They say it's fair; Liberals with a heart say it's fair. And the finance minister is proud of this budget. Can you believe it, Frank? He's proud of the budget.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Klees: I'd like to thank the members for their comments. At the end of the day, what counts here is what the people of Ontario think. There will be all kinds of excuses that we'll hear from the government benches over the next number of months, but the people of this province aren't buying it. It really does come down to integrity and whom people can trust. They have, in fact, lost trust in this government. They do not believe anything this government will say from this point forward, and that's really the issue.

What we're challenging the government to do is at least be straightforward with the people of this province, and if they believe it's important to raise taxes, that they do so in the context of the law of this province and not simply resort to excuses. That's really what it's about.

I want to thank a number of people from across the province who have gone to the trouble of becoming engaged in the political process: Alice Sheridan of Newmarket, who has gone out of her way to send in many of these, Doris Anderson of Richmond Hill, Mr and Mrs Fazio of Bolton, Mr Paul Spence of Unionville, Don Kelly of Gloucester, Mr James Green of Aurora, Mr Peter Kerr of Walkerton, Mr and Mrs Pup of Woodbridge and many hundreds of others who have taken the initiative because they don't want to give up. They see a government that is arrogant in its abuse of their taxes. They want accountability. They simply want good stewardship from their government. They're not receiving it. They have the opportunity to do something about it.

1720

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Beaches-East York.

Mr Prue: It is indeed an honour and a privilege to stand here and be the leadoff speaker today, now that we are again an official party and I have one hour to tell you my various thoughts on this bill. Unfortunately, I'm only going to be able to spend 40 minutes today, until 6 o'clock, but I'm looking forward to the 20 minutes to wrap up later.

I look at this entire budget bill, and it's a very long and very hard and complex bill for most ordinary Ontarians. They look at the bill and have a difficult time understanding many of the facets of the bill. I want to state at the outset in my criticism of this bill that we are opposing the bill not because of the many facets of the bill that ordinary people can support, but in fact because of the way the Liberals are choosing to get revenue generation.

There can be no doubt that some of the provisions of this bill are long overdue, are needed and will be welcomed, by and large, by the general public of this province. We have all lived through some very tough times. The last number of years have been very difficult, and I will go right back to the NDP days—not to say that they tried to make things difficult, but we were living through a recession in those years. There was not the money to do everything that was necessary, or that the party with which I'm now elected would have liked to do. The money was not there, but they struggled and did the best they could.

The last eight years were quite a bit different, though, because the money was available and a direct decision was made not to spend monies where we in our society needed them desperately. We lived through very tough times when times were good, and that is quite an anomaly in Canadian political life.

We lived through those tough times in our schools, where we saw the schools literally falling apart, a war with teachers, secretaries and caretakers and janitors being laid off, school closures, textbooks going to ruin. We saw all those things, and this new government saw them too. So, when you were presenting your budget, you were looking at ways to improve the rut that took over education in all those years, and who is to say you should not have done it?

We looked at the hospitals and the amount of money you need to run those hospitals after eight very brutal years when not enough money was put into the system, when literally thousands of nurses were laid off and declared redundant like Hula Hoops. We looked at that, and you looked at that. We all saw that happening. We saw an exodus of our personnel leaving the province, and we saw new people who came from abroad being unable to practise. Everyone in this room—or nearly everyone; I won't speak for my colleagues seated immediately to my right—could see the malaise of our hospitals and wanted to do something about it.

We looked at the crisis in home care. We saw a system that was set up, which hopefully could work and alleviate some of the problems of the hospitals, immediately start to fall apart, where ordinary citizens were replaced by Tory appointees and where the whole system of home care was underfunded and eventually fell apart, to the detriment of people who relied very seriously and very strongly on that type of care coming into their homes so they in turn would not end up in the hospital.

We looked at what happened to children's services, where there was no money for children and where we saw the poorest of poor children requiring a lot more than there was money or services to accommodate them.

We saw the plight of those on welfare and ODSP. Particularly, I'm going to deal first with people on welfare, who saw their budget slashed by 23%, and then over a period of some eight years saw no increase at all in the funding they had to spend for themselves and their

family, sometimes in very meagre surroundings outside the big cities, oftentimes where there was no work to be had, oftentimes with social, mental and other problems that required government services. They are, and continue to be, forced to live on what can only be called a pittance.

We saw the disabled, who mercifully got a little bit more money on ODSP, but even there they were limited to some $930 a month with no increases for the last eight years. We saw their plight, and I think anyone with a conscience would resolve to try to do something about that.

We saw the entire mess being made of our hydro for eight years: flipping back and forth between privatization and not privatizing, looking at various schemes, capping rates and all the mess that got into. Any government that was elected would want to try to resolve that issue.

We looked at the environment. It was in complete disarray, with the firing of water, health and meat inspectors, and all the inspectors we once relied upon in this great province being gone. The environment went down and down and down in the province of Ontario and made us susceptible to things like West Nile virus and all the tragedy of Walkerton.

We looked at what happened in the cities, where the cities started to deteriorate because of the government of the days action, of downloading responsibilities without the resources to deal with them, so that cities had more and more on their plate, and less and less money to spend. We saw the deterioration of the cities with the unkempt parks. We saw the deterioration of the cities with potholes. We saw the deterioration of the cities with child and welfare programs being slashed. We saw the deterioration of the cities in a thousand brutal ways.

We saw housing not being built across this great province, to the point that there are literally hundreds of thousands of families looking for decent affordable housing in Ontario. There is no housing that has been built that they can afford. Last but not least, we saw the entire problem that the previous government faced with its own employees: egging them on to strikes, dealing with them brutally, and not bargaining at any time in good faith.

All of those things were there on the plate. All of those things will have to be dealt with by this new government. These are tough things. I am not for a moment going to stand there and say that I expect you to deal with all of those problems in a single year, in a single budget, or possibly even in a single term. But what I'm going to ask you to do is seriously look at changing some aspects of your budget so that you can better deal with these problems and have your solutions accepted by the general public. Even though there is a lot of bravado over there—and to my left—that people are accepting this budget and like the fact that there's now going to be immunization for children in schools, and some other progressive things that the budget contains, there is a lot more angst and anger out there than you probably perceive.

There is angst and anger out there because your budget is not being accepted, because of the methodology that you are using to tax people when you said you wouldn't. Many people have said—and we in the NDP have called it that ourselves—it's the most regressive budget in modern times in the province of Ontario. Our criticism comes from the budget—not because of what it contains, because as I've said, there are many problems that are going to have to be dealt with, and you are attempting to deal with some of those problems as you deem best; our problem is that you are using a methodology of increasing your revenues which is brutal and which is regressive. The centrepiece of your entire budget is this whole thing of taking $300 to $900 per person to pay for health care. It is nothing more, nothing less, than a tax on ordinary working people. It's a regressive tax because the less you make, the greater the percentage you pay to the government for the care. This is the opposite of every other progressive tax that we have in the province of Ontario. It is the opposite, and even worse than, regressive taxes like the provincial sales tax, the GST or the flat taxes that so many people rail against daily. You are doing the same and possibly even worse.

Now, you often talk about, "The poorest of the poor aren't going to have to pay. If they make $20,000 or less, they are going to be exempt from paying." But who are the people who earn less than $20,000? Let's look at that. Someone who works 40 hours a week at minimum wage, who will make about $20,000 a year: That person may, depending on how close they are to the cusp, pay or not pay. Anyone else who makes more than minimum wage is going to be asked to give more money and be taxed.

1730

Every year the government of Canada and the government of Ontario look to the low-income cut-off figures to look precisely at what constitutes poverty in this country, what constituents poverty in this province. Take a look at those figures. If you want to know who is poor, take a look at those figures. If you live in a large city like Hamilton or Toronto or Ottawa or London, you live in a city of 500,000 or more. It is considered a large city. To live in a large city and not be poor, to meet the low-income cut-off figure which allows you sufficient monies to be able to meet your everyday needs without having to go to food banks and the like, a family of three requires $28,560. So a single person working, say a single mother working with two children—a family of three—earning $28,560 would be classified as meeting the low-income cut-off figure. If they make less than that—and I will tell you, there are tens or hundreds of thousands in this province who do—then they will be classified as poor. But being classified as poor is no salvation to them when it comes to your regressive tax because your regressive tax will tax them anyway, even though they're poor, even though they can't make the figure. If they make $27,000 or $28,000 a year, they are poor by all the standards which our government and the federal government set, yet you are going to tax them anyway.

Let's look to a family of five living in a place like Hamilton. A family of five living in a place like Hamil-

ton has to have $38,646 a year in order to not be poor. You make that much money and I guess you're deemed not to be poor, but if you only make $37,000 or $38,000—you don't make that extra $646—you are classified as poor and there are many things you cannot do. One of the things you cannot do is, if you are an immigrant family and you want to sponsor a relative to come to live in Canada, somebody who fits into the family class, and you already have, let's say, a family of five, a man and a wife who is at home looking after three young children, and you earn $38,645 a year—$1 below the low-income cut-off figure—you cannot sponsor your relatives. You cannot sponsor your mother, your father. You cannot sponsor a child, if you have a child. You cannot sponsor anyone who fits within the family class, because you are considered too poor to look after that additional person or persons. You're not too poor, though, to pay this new tax because, even though you can't sponsor a relative and even though the federal and provincial governments say that you are living in poverty, this government expects you to pay $450 in additional taxes for health care,

I will tell you what that's going to do. That's going to drive up the low-income cut-off figures even higher. In 1989, a socially progressive government, a Liberal government, as its cornerstone, did away with the OHIP premiums. You know why they did away with the OHIP premiums? Because they were unfair to the working poor. They determined that those people who had their employers paying the tax were primarily union people who had good-paying jobs and who didn't have to worry about it. It was those who paid it directly—the small business people, the poor, those who were unorganized—who had to pay their own. The Liberal government of the day—Robert Nixon, I'm sure, sitting over there in one of those seats, stood up. David Peterson, who was trying to be a socially progressive Premier of the time, came out with a bill that did away with those taxes. It did away with them, and we have lived in this province for 15 years having the direct taxes pay for our OHIP.

Now we have a government that is diametrically opposed to that socially progressive measure.

Mr Marchese: Trudeau is gone. That's what I think.

Mr Prue: I think Trudeau died some time ago, and his whole philosophy, I think, in the Liberal Party died with him.

Anyway, now we have a government that wants to go back and take the money from the same people that it saved, in part, from poverty all those years ago. We have a government that really doesn't care. I have to tell you that half of the people had their premiums paid by their employer, very different from today, because literally today everybody's is paid from that general pot. So today there isn't the half that you're protecting, that employers are going to look after, because today you're asking everybody except the employer to pay.

This is going to spawn a whole new bunch of things too. This is going to spawn, I'm sure, wage demands, which you should think about, because I'll bet you every single unionized worker out there is now looking to recoup this money in the next round of bargaining. I'll tell you, every single provincial civil servant, when it comes to the next round of bargaining, will be looking for that $600 to $900 each, on top of whatever raise they're asking for, because this is money that has been lost to them and that they will attempt to regain. You had better think about that.

Mr Marchese: But McGuinty won't let that happen.

Mr Prue: Well, I'm not sure whether he's going to let it, but I'm telling you that this is going to spawn that whole bad feeling among organized labour.

Mr Marchese: It's going to be tough.

Mr Prue: They're going to be tough and they're going to fight for it. Don't pretend it's not going to happen, because you know full well it is.

You had a choice as a government. You had a choice and you chose not to do it. You chose the easy way, and perhaps, if you thought it was the easy way, like hitting everybody—

Mr Colle: This isn't easy.

Mr Prue: Yes, I think this was. There were easier ways. There were easier ways for you to do it.

Mr Wilkinson: What's the easy way?

Mr Prue: Well, the easiest way for you to do it was to roll back the surtaxes the Tories took off people who earned above $100,000 and above $150,000—the 3% and 6%. That alone would have got you $1.6 billion from people who could afford it: people like you, people like me, people who could afford it. You've raised $2.4 billion. I'm going to tell you how you can find $2.4 billion a lot easier than hitting the little guys. The second thing you could have done was eliminate the employer health tax exemptions, and the third thing you could have done was return the corporate rates to 1999. Those three things, which would not have hit little people at all, would have recouped $2.6 billion—$200 million more than you're getting from whacking all these little people, from whacking all these people and making them mad, from whacking these people who are screaming at the doorsteps at your federal cousins, from whacking these people who think that they have been misled. Let me put "Misled" on these great television ads: "I'm not going to raise your taxes." Look me right in the eye.

You could have done it by simply being a little bit smarter than what you have done, because this is a regressive tax, contrary to what the Minister of Finance has said, that he's proud, that it's the only tax in Canada that is prorated on how much you earn. That could be true, but there's only one other province that I'm aware of that actually whacks people like that, and that's the province of Alberta. Most of the other provinces don't have anything of this sort. So whether it's prorated, whether it's on an escalating scale or not, doesn't matter at all, because it doesn't happen in Quebec or Nova Scotia or Newfoundland or Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick or Manitoba or Saskatchewan or even, I think, BC. So let's be real.

You've also done a number of other things that have got people kind of angry, although not angry to anywhere

near the same extent. You are raising the costs and fees on everything that people do, from driving to fishing, to hunting licences, to all of the licences, to all of the fees that you charge for everything from birth certificates to death certificates. This will not affect the ordinary person until, of course, they have to apply for those licences or pay the fees for the services that they require from the province. Those niggling one-time expenses, when they come, will be felt hard, and I will tell you, people will be angry for a long, long time when they see those escalations in costs.

1740

You have also done something that I think is going to make, and has made, a great many people angry in terms of the petitions and letters we are starting to see in all of our offices, and that is the delisting of tertiary health costs in three areas: $104 million that you plan to save from chiropractic services; $37 million that you plan to save from optometrist services, people going in to get their eyes tested; and last but not least, some $16 million for physiotherapy for people who are now going to have to pay for that service as well.

We're looking here at about $150 million, which is a lot of money, of course, but it's going to cost a lot more aggravation to you as a government to delist and privatize those services, to make people pay for things they have come to expect: to go to a chiropractor when your back hurts, to go to an optometrist when you need your eyes tested, to go for physiotherapy when you require it as a result of a fall or an accident or something that is not covered either in the workplace or by your insurance. Those are medical facilities that people believe they are entitled to and want. To simply delist those in an effort to save money, even if you plan to spend the money in other places like immunization for children, is causing considerable angst.

I ask you, as a government, to stop and think about what you are doing. Hopefully, as one of the members said earlier, spurred on by a backbench Liberal, you will take the opportunity to try to change that when this bill is sent to committee. We certainly would welcome this bill being sent to committee, because we think people will come from across the province to tell you the errors of some of those things you are cutting.

We in the New Democratic Party are also disappointed with how you are dealing with the child benefit clawback. You, as a party, promised going into this election in written letters to the national poverty organizations that you would immediately, as a first act of government, end what the Tories had done for the child benefit clawback; you would end that and you would give the money that has been refunded by the federal government to the poorest of poor families; you would give that back to them in terms of monies that were owing to them. An average family with two children could expect $233 per month in much-needed funds if they were on social assistance. One or two parents on Ontario disability or if they were working at or near minimum wage could expect $233 a month. In fact, social welfare reformers have said that if there was only one thing you did to help the poor, the greatest single thing you could do would be to end the child benefit clawback.

I have to tell you that your budget was woefully inadequate. The suggestion you are making that you are going to give them back that proportion of the clawback which came into effect this year is a pittance. It will amount to only $7.42, and it will leave the hundreds of thousands of children in our province who live in poverty stuck in that poverty. Quite frankly, I think that is a disgrace.

You have also said as a government that you want to help the poor. The poorest among us, frankly, are those who are on welfare, who have not had an increase for eight years, those who had their wages slashed by 21% by the previous government, those who had their monies slashed by 21% and then a further 13% caused by the erosion of incomes due to inflation over those same eight years, a reduction of 34%.

It must be very hard to live on $530 a month. I would ask any of the members opposite to dream about having to live on that kind of money for an entire month. I would hazard a guess you couldn't do it for even a week, never mind a month. In fact, most of you would require double or triple that per week even to make it. But we have people in this province who have no other choice.

I spent part of last week with my colleague Gilles Bisson in a tiny little town in northern Ontario called Ogoki. It is a reserve made up of native Canadians. Some 300 people live there, and there is work for only a couple of weeks, three, four, five weeks a year. They work as hunters, sometimes as trappers. They live off the land. They fish. They are hired to ferry people into some of the better fishing spots. They work with the mining and prospecting claims when they can get work. They might work for the Indian band. But the majority of people who live in that town are chronically unemployed. They rely on welfare, and their welfare is some $530 for an adult male per month, and quite frankly, if you were to go there and if you were to look at the poverty in which they live, I think you would all be appalled. I certainly have seen poverty like that before, but it was totally endemic. It was in almost every single house.

We look, too, to what you have done for the people on ODSP. You promised great things to them, but all that has been delivered is a 3% increase. After eight years of no extra money, seeing their real incomes decline by some 13% due to inflation, they are now being offered 3%. That will take them back to where they were about seven years, six years ago. That 3%, although welcome, amounts to about $25 per month for a single person who is disabled. They now go all the way up to about $955 from $930. For that, they can expect and continue and will always be in poverty, because they continue to make less than $12,000 a year, and for $12,000 a year, one cannot expect to live in any kind of housing, in any kind of city or town in Ontario without being forced daily to the food banks. Your $27, your $25—whatever it comes out to—is tantamount to one less trip to the food bank per

month than they're doing now, and nothing more. In fact, much of that money will be swallowed up by landlords, I'm sure, in the rental of the properties, when they find out that the people now have that little bit more to spend.

There's so much more that should have been in this budget. The Liberals talked in the last election about how they wanted to improve child care. I don't know how many meetings I went to; I don't know how many Liberals I talked to or heard; they were always saying the same thing: "We are going to give some $300 million more for child care." Well, the reality is that you're not giving any money in this budget to child care. It has been totally neglected. The thousands of children who are on waiting lists, the many parents who want to go out to work but can't because they cannot find decent affordable child care, are left in the same predicament that they were under the previous government. One could have and should have expected a lot more from Liberals.

We have the whole problem of hydro—how you came close to balancing this budget. Three point nine billion dollars, by sleight of hand, was moved from the taxpayers to the ratepayers. It's a pretty neat accounting trick in this House. People said it was tantamount to Enron or Arthur Andersen. I'm not sure it was quite that good, because it was immediately seen by everyone. What this $3.9 billion was supposed to be was a guarantee for expensive hydro contracts that were signed between 1980 and 1990. And, in fact, the removal of this will do nothing except drive up the costs of hydro in Ontario. That $3.9-billion debt that existed with the province of Ontario became a one-year revenue, and has dropped the deficit from $6.1 billion to $2.2 billion, which, I guess, to those who are not paying a great deal of attention, looks rather good. In fact, I saw a little tiny newspaper the other day that commended the Liberals for holding the line and for dropping the debt to $2.2 billion. I think the poor author of that never realized for one second that that isn't what happened at all, that his hydro rates will go up for the next 12 years, and that the government, after this year, will have no source with which to keep the monies down.

The four-year fiscal framework in this document is absolutely appalling. Not only did you rely on the $3.9 billion of hydro for one year to assuage all the fears of those who were thinking that you were going to run multi-year deficits, but you have left yourself open and you're going to have to scramble for revenues next year. In fact, without that $3.9 billion, you're not going to have the funds that you're talking about next year at all.

1750

If you look at the projections put forward by the finance minister, he has unreasonable expenditure increases between 2004 and 2007. This year he had a $4-billion to $5-billion revenue expenditure necessary. As I've said, we commend you on some of the ways that you are spending that money; not all of them, but at least some of them are laudatory and we would support, like the one cent gas tax to municipalities, like the immunization of children. But you're spending $4 billion to $5 billion extra this year. Next year's projection is that you'll only spend an additional $500 million, $500 million again in 2006, and $1.7 billion in 2007. Quite frankly, that cannot maintain the promises that are being made here today, given the fiscal and financial framework that the province finds itself in.

On education: Dalton McGuinty promised to be the education Premier. The present education minister promised that we were going see great changes in education in Ontario. I have to tell you, the last couple of days have shown how that seems to be falling apart. In newspaper article after newspaper article, in paper after paper, they are starting to talk about how this whole fiscal framework for education is not doing what it was intended to do. People are starting to see the Rozanski report for what it was and what it said and where the money was to be spent. Money had been bled from the education system, there is no doubt.

Rozanski talked about the need for more teachers. Rozanski talked about rebuilding the structure of the schools. He talked about rehiring librarians. He talked about caretakers, secretaries, books and computers. But where is the $850 million that the Liberals are about to spend? Is it going to any of these things? I'll tell you, very little of the money is going to what Rozanski said.

Some $450 million, which you don't have, is going to cap class sizes. That's a laudatory goal. I'm not going to tell you that you shouldn't do it. If you had tons of money, I'd tell you that you should, but you don't have tons of money. You're taking $450 million that you don't have to cap class sizes. I would tell you that is a mistake. You have other, far more pressing priorities than that. Rozanski said you need $2 billion just to bring the infrastructure and the system back to where it was, and he never even once mentioned class sizes.

You're also going to be spending a lot of unnecessary monies on tests for literacy and numeracy at the expense of things that need to be done in our schools: schools that can be kept open in rural communities and in isolated areas; schools that no longer have vice-principals or principals or librarians or caretakers. That is where, quite frankly, you should be spending the money, and if you have an opportunity at this point, I'm urging you to spend the $850 million, but please do it wisely. Don't waste it on capping class sizes, as laudatory as that—

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Greatest news ever.

Mr Prue: They have the greatest news ever. When their school falls apart, they won't be saying it's that good.

On privatization—it sent a chill up my spine. First of all, I was very happy when the Premier started to talk about privatization and he said that we're not going to do it because it's a short-sighted policy, and he's absolutely right. But in the second breath, he says that we're going to leave that option open and we're going to study it for the next year or so. We're going to study the privatization of the LCBO, and that was the one he specifically mentioned. I want to tell you to can the study now. Don't go there. It is a cash cow. It makes $1 billion a year. It

provides a good service. The public certainly doesn't want you to be selling that off in order to make another infusion of $1 billion or $2 billion—

Interjections.

Mr Prue: No, but he said he's leaving it open and I just want to warn you not to do it. That was the statement he made. He made that very statement while presenting his—and I listened very carefully to what he had to say.

You've done some good things. I just want to talk about municipalities and the two-cents on the gas tax. You're on the right track. Certainly it was in our document that we went to the people with, and it was in your document. I commend you for being on the right track on the gas tax. I am not sure that you should do it over two years—I wish you could do it all at once—but I understand the difficulties.

The penny is a good thing, but you're going to have to make a determination as to how that gas tax is apportioned: to which municipalities and for what purposes. I'm going to suggest that you should be looking to put the gas tax where it will get the biggest bang for your buck in terms of transit. Those municipalities that have transit systems should get a significantly higher portion, based on ridership, than those that choose not to have them. It will be an incentive for municipalities that have not invested in public transit to reinvest or to start looking at investing in ways they have never done before, if they're not going to get the money.

However, if you just apportion it across Ontario on the basis of the number of people who live a the town or city, you are not, in the end, going to get the best bang that can be had for that one cent on the gas tax.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): What about a combination?

Mr Prue: You could look at a combination. I know that a combination could be looked at too, but I'm asking you to base it as closely as possible on ridership as opposed to population. There's no doubt it's going to fall somewhere between the two, but get it as close to ridership and as far from population as you can, without making too many people angry. Enough people are angry at you already, so make sure you don't get too many more angry at you, but do it that way.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): Why are you getting all the people in Guelph angry at me?

Mr Prue: Well, Guelph needs to have a better public transportation system. You have to convince them that the money will come. You know, "When you build it, the money will come." That's the old adage. Just like baseball, "Build it and they will come."

Notwithstanding the one cent—and it's a good thing—I have to say we remain a little cautious and a little nervous because of the flatlining or the reductions in some 12 ministries. Some of the ministries contained in there do a significant amount of work in municipal infrastructure. If they are going to be flatlined or have their budgets reduced, we are going to see that offset in the municipalities themselves: everything from daycare to public works, to health and the environment. They're all there, and what the municipalities do very much involves them. If you're going to flatline them, you potentially could cause some grief to the municipalities. So be very careful about how that money is flatlined; we'll be looking to the estimates for that.

Interjection.

Mr Prue: I've still got another 20 minutes on the next day. I've got a whole hour's worth of stuff to tell you to do.

In the last minute or so before 6 o'clock, the infrastructure expenditure by this government is actually less than the Tories had in their last three budgets. It's actually less, and it's certainly considerably less than the infrastructure expenditures of the NDP between 1990 and 1995. Now I understand why they had that money then.

Interjection.

Mr Prue: Yes, the deficit was there, but there was also the need to get people back to work. The municipalities were asking for joint projects, and that money was spent. But I'm telling you that infrastructure should be looked at. Slightly under $2.5 billion is less than the Tories were spending the last couple of years. That needs to be reviewed in clause-by-clause when this goes out to committee, as we hope it does.

Mr Speaker, is this an appropriate time to stop? I can keep going if you want.

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45 pm today.

The House adjourned at 1759.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 31 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 31 mai 2004

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: May I have unanimous consent for a two-minute recess to meet with the chief opposition whip and with the representative of the New Democratic Party?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Agreed? So be it; a two-minute recess.

The House recessed from 1846 to 1848.

Hon Mr Duncan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I request unanimous consent for another five-minute recess to allow for further discussion.

The Acting Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

The House recessed from 1849 to 1854.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR RAISON MÉDICALE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 29, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family medical leave and other matters / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour raison médicale et d'autres questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Further debate? Seeing no further debate, Mr Bentley has moved second reading of Bill 56. Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Agreed. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

Orders of the day?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? It's carried. This House stands adjourned until 1:30 pm tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1856.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 1 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1er juin 2004

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ALMEDA BROWN

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I rise to recognize Almeda Brown, who has joined us here today with family and friends in the members' west gallery. Mrs Brown is here from Port Carling, in my beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, to receive the Ontario Senior Achievement Award. This award is presented to 20 individuals annually as a way to recognize and honour outstanding seniors who, after age 65, have made significant contributions to their communities. Mrs Brown has done just that.

Since the 1930s, she has been a vital part of her community, dedicating endless time and energy to the service of those around her. Throughout this time, she has volunteered extensively with organizations such as the Royal Canadian Legion, the Port Carling United Church Women's Auxiliary and the Sanford Women's Institute, with which she has been involved for over 65 years. On top of all this, she and her late husband raised nine children, and she is presently a grandmother to 16 and great-grandmother to 22. I had the pleasure of attending her 90th birthday last September.

I'd like to quote from the letter nominating Mrs Brown: "If a person's true wealth is the good she does in the world, then Almeda Brown is a very rich woman indeed."

Therefore, in celebration of today being the first day of Seniors' Month, I would like to congratulate and thank Mrs Almeda Brown for all the service she has volunteered throughout her life. She has helped many, and stands as an example for all of us.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Well, that's hard to follow. That's a real hard act to follow.

As we all know in this Legislature, we had an opportunity last week to be back home in our ridings, what we call constituency week. It gave us all an opportunity to go back and get connected with the people who voted us in here at Queen's Park.

I know it was a particularly difficult week for Liberals going back home, because I've got to say, did I hear it, as I was out door-knocking on behalf of our federal campaign and talking to people generally. Boy, oh boy, it's not a popular day to be a Liberal. Between broken promises and that budget, when it comes to the delisting of health care services and a new tax where people are having to pay even more money off their hard-earned paycheques, it's got to be tough being a Liberal. I just want you to know my heart goes out to you. It really does. I want you to know, on behalf of the New Democratic Party of Ontario, we feel for you, but you set up your own problem.

Anyway, the other opportunity we had during the week was to meet with many of the people in the First Nations communities up on James Bay and into Ogoki. I just want to say to the government in passing, and we're going to have an opportunity to talk about this later—it's the whole issue of capital funding. We know that the provincial government is talking about a $300-million fund, with another $300 million to be added by the federal government, for municipal infrastructure, but we cannot forget our First Nations communities.

There are desperate needs in our First Nations communities in order to make sure that they build their infrastructure. The federal Liberal government has fallen down on the job. Let not this provincial Liberal government fall down on the job of supporting our First Nations communities.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Today is Injured Workers' Day. Over 300,000 workers are injured every year while on the job, and almost 100,000 of them were injured severely enough that they had to take time off work. They are workers: the people who build our vehicles, grow our food, build our homes and sell us goods and services every day. Without them, the economy would grind to a halt. They are the lifeblood of our economy.

We must continue to do more to ensure the safety of workers in Ontario. So I am happy to see our government renewing its commitment to enforcing the Employment Standards Act. Fair workplaces are safer workplaces. Educating and training workers and cracking down on bad employers through enforcement, and even prosecution where necessary, are important steps on the road to safer workplaces.

There are too many people injured at work. And sadly for some, prevention comes too late. In 2002, traumatic accidents took the lives of 110 workers in Ontario. We

honour those who have been injured at work today. On Thursday, we in this House will have a chance to honour the memory of those who lost their lives at work when we debate my private member's bill to erect a memorial to workers killed on the job.

KIDS' FISHING DAY

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the participants and everyone who volunteered at our fourth annual Kids' Fishing Day event that took place this past weekend at the Heber Down Conservation Area. The event was both rewarding and fun-filled for the children and adults alike and attracted over 1,000 participants to come and enjoy the great outdoors.

The event could not have taken place without tremendous help from numerous organizations, including the South Central Ontario Big Game Association, the Pickering Rod and Gun Club, the Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Toronto Sportsman's Show, Orono Fish and Hunt Club, Ontario Out of Doors Magazine, Eastview Boys and Girls Club, the Bait Association of Ontario, Oshawa Community Health Centre, Metro East Anglers, the YWCA and Simcoe Hall Settlement House, who all contributed time and effort to the great success of the event.

This was a great opportunity for kids who usually don't have the chance to go fishing to learn about fishing and nature and have fun discovering the outdoors at the same time. Rods, reels and bait, as well as lunch, were provided. The children also enjoyed demonstrations by the Ministry of Natural Resources, dog-handling exhibits, fly casting, nature hikes, face painting, as well as a special appearance by Percy the Perch. Buses were arranged to pick up kids at several locations throughout Oshawa.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers, including Norm Monaghan, Vern Mason, Peter Dickson, Dan McWilliams and all the local groups and organizations for their support, along with the dedicated volunteers who made this event so special.

Finally, I'd like to thank all the parents and the kids, who had such a rewarding experience, and invite them all back again next year for the event. I should also say that there are still several hundred one- to four-pound rainbow trout waiting to be caught.

1340

BRAMPTON

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): "Brampton has an unusually large, attractive and urban core. Brampton makes a deliberate effort to retain its immigrants, attaching them firmly to the community by its quality of life, its schools and its opportunities. Brampton has one of the lowest crime rates in Canada, and it may be one of the country's most cosmopolitan and economically sophisticated communities." These are the words of this country's most respected urban planner, Jane Jacobs.

I would like to take this opportunity to salute both Ms Jacobs and my home community. As a tireless advocate of community development, Ms Jacobs's recent Toronto Star article singled out Brampton as an example of the beauty that can be found in our suburban communities across the province.

Ms Jacobs's article also serves as a warning that issues like traffic congestion, a lack of green space and the hollowing out of our respective urban cores can threaten the very social fabric that binds us together. I and the people of my riding are pleased with our government's budget commitments to inject much-needed infrastructure and transportation funds into my long-overlooked community, which respects Ms Jacobs's vision of urban development. Brampton is an excellent place to live.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): It has been said that Helen of Troy had the face that launched a thousand ships. On May 18, Dalton McGuinty and Greg Sorbara presented a budget that could sink them—"them" being their federal Liberal cousins. The anger being directed at this government over their exercise in deception is unprecedented in political history. This could well be the first time that a provincial budget brings down a federal government. In Paul Martin's campaign, Dalton McGuinty is about as welcome as a root canal. Dalton McGuinty's own backbenchers are trying to separate themselves from this betrayal of their own election promises. As I travelled last week through my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, the words I heard over and over again were: "Those no-good"—insert a word here that rhymes with tires—"should be booted out of office immediately. They made all of these promises and never intended to keep them."

It's no wonder that people are cynical about politicians and politics. Mr McGuinty himself said that Paul Martin's own election promises are just made in the heat of the battle. Is this where we've gotten to? Say anything just to get elected? Oh, pardon me; that already happened last October 2. The people are seething at the McGuinty Liberals over their litany of broken promises. On June 28, they will take their disgust out on the Martin Liberals, but don't be too smug, Dalton. Your day will come, too.

WILLIAM OSLER HEALTH CENTRE

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise today to commemorate the hard work of a dedicated group of volunteers: the volunteer board of directors of the William Osler Health Centre. The members of the board have dedicated their time and energy to the construction of a new hospital, all while making tough, necessary decisions in the operation of three separate campuses.

In a speech to the Ontario Hospital Association on November 5, 2003, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smitherman, called on hospitals to open lines of communication with their local MPPs, saying, "If we are to succeed, all MPPs must be better informed on health care issues." The board has embraced this request.

As well, I wish to make special mention of the president and CEO of William Osler, Mr Bob Bell. I'm pleased to report to this House that Mr Bell has gone above and beyond the minister's request. Mr Bell takes time out of his schedule at least once a week to call my office to keep me updated on issues at this hospital. His dedication is beyond question.

When the doors at Brampton's new hospital open, it will be due to the unwavering commitment of this government, Mr Bell, the staff of William Osler and the volunteer board of directors. For this, the people of Brampton Centre are very grateful.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I'm pleased with Minister Sorbara's first budget, especially the attention given to health, education and public transportation. I believe the increase of $2.6 billion for education, $2.2 billion for health and two cents a litre of the existing gas that will be given to municipalities is the first step in the right direction.

Last week, during constituency week, I met with taxpayers and school and hospital officials in my riding of Thornhill who were extremely optimistic about the budget's commitment to health, education and public transportation.

I strongly believe in public transportation, because it will minimize air pollution, which causes respiratory and other health problems. More public transportation means less gridlock. Our economy loses billions of dollars each year due to gridlock.

I am extremely pleased that the budget includes money for an environmental assessment of the Spadina-York subway extension to reach the region of York. A subway to York University will make it more accessible for students so that they can spend more time in the classrooms and libraries and at home. Moreover, a subway extension to York University will create substantial economic stimulus in and around the corridors of the campus. There will be a greater supply of high-density residential and new businesses on the abundant underdeveloped lands that lie there today.

I am excited to be part of a government that addresses the core needs of our citizens and is not afraid of taking the necessary measures to improve the standard of living of our great province.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): The Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre is the largest hospital in northwestern Ontario. With 375 beds, a regional cancer centre, mental health services and a very busy emergency department, this hospital is critical to delivering quality health care to northern Ontarians. It serves an area larger than all of southern Ontario, with a population of 275,000 people.

That is why my constituents were so pleased yesterday when Premier McGuinty announced that the Ontario government will cover an unprecedented 80% of eligible capital costs for the new Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre.

The McGuinty government is committed to delivering health care results. That means shorter wait times, better access to doctors and nurses, and substantial improvements in long-term care.

The new regional cancer centre in Thunder Bay will provide better access to cancer care for northern Ontarians by doubling the number of annual radiation and chemotherapy treatments provided by 2010. This is great news for residents of Thunder Bay and across northern Ontario.

This, along with the Liberal government's support for our northern medical school, will help build a state-of-the-art health care system in the north, where doctors, nurses and other health care professionals are able to provide the quality of care that people deserve.

Together with our budget commitment to provide free immunizations for our children, expanded home care and improved long-term care for our frail and elderly, this investment will help Ontario become a leader in publicly funded health care once again.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I'd like you all to pay special attention to what I've got to say now. I want you all to join me in welcoming a group of legislative pages to serve in the first session of the 38th Parliament: Meghan Allerton from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound; Jason Andary from Chatham-Kent-Essex; Taisa Dackiw from Etobicoke-Lakeshore; Bradley Emerson from Mississauga South; Jaimie Franks from Mississauga West; Jordana Gilroy from York West; Jessica Guthrie from Niagara Centre; Brendan Hamilton from Thunder Bay-Superior North; Malakai Rose Kirkpatrick from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock; Eric Koehn from Markham; Branndyce-Leigh Little from Kingston and the Islands; Jeongho Peter Lyu from Oak Ridges; Logan Maines from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington; Jessica Mair from Hamilton East; Ian McKellar from Kitchener-Waterloo; Cameron McMeekin from Hamilton Mountain; Samuel Merrifield from Nickel Belt; Emily Morin from Nipissing; Andrew Naismith from Thornhill; Dylan Robertson from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge; Vivienne Steele from Sault Ste Marie; and Olivia Whetung Cole from Guelph-Wellington.

Let's join in welcoming them to serve our Parliament.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND SOCIAL POLICY

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice and social policy and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act / Projet de loi 8, Loi créant le Conseil ontarien de la qualité des services de santé, édictant une nouvelle loi relative à l'accessibilité aux services de santé et abrogeant la Loi sur l'accessibilité aux services de santé, prévoyant l'imputabilité du secteur des services de santé et modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Shall the report be received and adopted?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Orazietti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Gravelle, Michael	Racco, Mario G.
Brown, Michael A.	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Smitherman, George
Cordiano, Joseph	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McGuinty, Dalton	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Wong, Tony C.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Baird, John R.	Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill
Chudleigh, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	O'Toole, John
Churley, Marilyn	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 58; the nays are 15.

The Speaker: The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Mr Bryant moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 86, An Act to amend the Election Act, the Election Finances Act, the Legislative Assembly Act and the Representation Act, 1996 to provide for provincial general elections at intervals of approximately four years, to govern the timing of writs, close of nominations and polling day, to make modifications relating to the electoral readjustment process, and to make technical amendments / Projet de loi 86, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, la Loi sur le financement des élections, la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi de 1996 sur la représentation électorale en vue de prévoir la tenue des élections générales provinciales à intervalles d'environ quatre ans, de régir le calendrier relatif à l'émission des décrets, à la clôture du dépôt des déclarations de candidature et au jour du scrutin, et d'apporter des modifications au processus de révision électorale ainsi que des modifications de forme.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried. Attorney General?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I'll make a statement during ministers' statements.

GARETH RODGERS ACT FOR SPORT PARACHUTING (FREEFALLING REGULATION), 2004

LOI GARETH RODGERS DE 2004 SUR LE PARACHUTISME SPORTIF (RÉGLEMENTATION DU SAUT SANS SOUTIEN)

Mr Tascona moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 87, An Act in memory of Gareth Rodgers to regulate freefalling / Projet de loi 87, Loi à la mémoire de Gareth Rodgers pour réglementer le saut sans soutien.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried. Mr Tascona?

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): The bill enacts and act to regulate persons who participate in free-falling and promote public safety.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS AND SECURITY GUARDS AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES ENQUÊTEURS PRIVÉS ET LES GARDIENS

Mr Dunlop moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to amend the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act / Projet de loi 88, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les enquêteurs privés et les gardiens.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried. Mr Dunlop?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): If passed, this legislation will make the most significant changes to the operation of the private security industry since the first bill was introduced over 35 years ago.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ELECTORAL REFORM

RÉFORME ÉLECTORALE

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Last fall, our government was elected to deliver real, positive change. Since then, we've taken action on our commitments by introducing a progressive legislative agenda in this House. One of the cornerstones of that agenda is strengthening our democracy, and our government is making progress.

We have introduced legislation that would eliminate the waste of taxpayers' dollars on partisan, self-promotional government advertising.

We have given every government MPP a seat on powerful cabinet committees that help set policy, and we have appointed Ontario's first minister responsible for democratic renewal. But more is needed to restore people's faith in our democracy.

In the first 100 years of Ontario's history, about two thirds of registered voters regularly went to the polls. In the last four elections, that number has declined steadily from 64% in 1990 to 57% last fall.

Près de un Ontarien sur deux ne voit pas l'utilité de se rendre aux urnes. Certains d'entre eux ont perdu toute illusion quant aux processus. D'autres adoptent une attitude cynique. La seule façon d'inverser cette tendance est d'engager nos citoyens. Il faut montrer à ceux qui ont perdu toute illusion et qui font preuve de cynisme que le gouvernement peut changer. Il faut montrer aux jeunes gens en particulier pourquoi il est important de voter.

We need to get more Ontarians to the polls on election day. Voting in an election should be easy so that as many of us as possible can participate, as citizens, in choosing our representatives.

The parliamentary system based on the Westminster model has served us well. We respect this parliamentary tradition, including the tradition of change that is built into our system. Indeed, the ability to change and adapt is what keeps our system so strong. So it would be foolish to limit ourselves to 19th-century methods to deal with 21st-century challenges. Change is what keeps our democracy vibrant and vital, and change is what we are introducing today.

The decision of when to call an election has always rested with the Premier of this province. It allows the government to call an election when it feels it can win. It serves no one but the governing party. It's a perk of being in power, and it ignores the most important members of any democracy: its citizens. That's why our system needs to change. That's why today we're embracing the change that is central to our democracy by introducing legislation to fix the dates of elections in Ontario.

We're pleased to introduce the Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2004. If passed, it would make election day in this province the first Thursday in October, every four years, starting in 2007. It will mean that the date of the next election will be October 4, 2007.

Les élections sont des événements démocratiques qui appartiennent à nous tous. Elles n'appartiennent pas au parti au pouvoir qui pourrait ainsi les manipuler à son propre avantage.

Elections don't belong to Premiers to use as they see fit for their own political agenda. Elections belong to all of us, as citizens, and we have a right to know when they will be held, so that we can plan effectively and participate fully. Elections belong to all political parties, so that all of us are on an equal footing and can compete for office fairly. They belong to Elections Ontario, so it can plan efficiently for upcoming elections. They belong to public servants, so that the important work they do to deliver and continuously improve public services can proceed efficiently, without the disruption of snap election calls or the delays of calls postponed.

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Elections belong to anyone who wants to run for office or work in a campaign, so they can get their personal and professional lives in order, and that way they will be able to more fully participate in our democratic process. Elections belong to each and every one of us as citizens, so that we can put aside some time every four years to think about the direction of our province and its government and to talk to our friends, families, neighbours and co-workers about what needs to be done and who is best suited to do it.

This is how government should work in the 21st century. This is how it will work in Ontario from now on. Never again will a governing party be able to manipulate the date of an election to serve its own interests.

Le premier ministre n'aura plus jamais la capacité de fixer les dates des élections en fonction de leur caractère opportun d'un point de vue politique.

Never again will a Premier have the ability to set election dates when it is politically opportune for the government. I, as Premier, am forever renouncing this right. I am doing it for one reason and one reason only: because it's the right thing to do.

This is an important step toward strengthening democracy in our province. It's part of our government's agenda to modernize Ontario's democratic institutions, to engage the people of this province in the most ambitious democratic renewal process in our history, to get more Ontarians participating in the democratic process, to make government in Ontario work for the people of Ontario.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): It is my honour to rise today with the Premier of Ontario to introduce this bill and support this historic step in the renewal of democracy in our province.

With the introduction of this bill, our government is continuing the important work of restoring public faith in Ontario's democracy and in its democratic institutions. Governments of all stripes have long played games with election dates, and it's time for that to come to an end. Creating certainty around election timing will bolster economic certainty, public confidence in elections and the ability of government to govern effectively. Setting election dates in a four-year cycle may not be in the political interest of the incumbent governing party, but it is most definitely in the public interest, and it is in the public interest that this government is acting on this important commitment.

There was a time when the sovereign literally and formally determined an election date. Since Confederation, that prerogative vested in a first minister. This first minister is relinquishing that privilege and opportunity. This first minister, this Premier, is saying that forevermore the Legislature will determine the date, fix the date on a four-year cycle, and this Premier has given up that "divine right" to set elections. That is leadership.

Over the coming months, we'll be working to ensure that more people, particularly young people, vote during elections, get engaged in their communities and participate in the democratic process. We'll be leading an open debate on improvements to our electoral process, leading to a referendum on electoral reform. We'll be asking citizens to make recommendations on how we fund political campaigns so that money has less influence on politics. We'll be encouraging more transparency and openness in how and where tax dollars are spent by ensuring that the public interest is front and centre.

This is the most ambitious democratic renewal agenda since Confederation, right here in the province of Ontario, and I'm proud to be a part of it.

PLANNING REFORM

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): This morning at a special Canadian Urban Institute meeting, I had an opportunity to share our government's progress as we move forward on a planning reform agenda.

As you know, our government is committed to making the real, positive change that will lead to a strong and prosperous Ontario, now and in the future. We are moving ahead in numerous ways to accomplish this goal. Planning reform is one key factor. We all know the importance of good planning. Through it we're able to develop safe, liveable neighbourhoods, reduce urban sprawl and protect our green spaces, target investment in infrastructure, ease the flow of traffic and so much more.

Good planning allows us to meet the needs of a growing population. It helps Ontarians gain opportunities to create a quality of life that is second to none. It is clearly necessary to building the strong communities, competitive economy and healthy environment we all want. Our government's planning reform proposals would ensure balance and fairness as we move forward.

Our agenda for planning reform is in keeping with our government's visionary response to growth management in this province. The need for action is clear. In the last 15 years, the Toronto-Hamilton area has become one of the fastest-growing regions in North America. In the last 10 years, we've added more people and more new jobs than the rest of Ontario combined. This economic growth and opportunity are expected to attract 3.5 million more people by the year 2031.

Our government welcomes this growth. We know it's vital for new business, new jobs and new opportunities, but we also know it will put immense pressure on our land, air and infrastructure. For the sake of our quality of life, our economy, our environment and our children's children, we must put in place a well-thought-out plan to accommodate this growth.

Our government is moving forward on this in a proactive, disciplined way. Spearheaded by my colleague David Caplan, the Golden Horseshoe growth management plan will be a guide to resolving growth issues over the next 30 years. It is currently being developed cooperatively among ministries and with the input of experts and stakeholders.

It will provide direction for provincial and municipal decision-making on growth issues all across the Golden Horseshoe. The growth management plan will identify the areas we need to protect and encourage growth in those areas that can best accommodate it. It will help us support that growth with infrastructure investments, safe management of our drinking water and wastewater, protection of our parklands and more.

It will pay just as much attention to the economy. It will identify areas where new population and economic growth will be encouraged, and will help ensure the efficient movement of goods and services across the region. This bold new plan will pull together all the various strings of growth: planning; infrastructure; transportation and transit; residential and employment lands; farmlands; and every other aspect. Through it, our government will share our overarching vision for a strong Ontario.

We are already moving forward in priority areas. In December, as you know, I introduced legislation that, if passed, would be the first step to creating a permanent greenbelt of protected land stretching from Niagara Falls

to Rice Lake near Cobourg. The Greenbelt Task Force, chaired by Burlington Mayor Rob MacIsaac, is currently consulting on key parts of the study area that should be protected, including agricultural lands.

We have committed to establishing the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority to coordinate both transportation and transit needs. Of course, our proposals for planning reform would discourage sprawl and promote intensification, protect natural heritage features and watersheds, promote mixed-use development that results in real neighbourhoods and give Ontarians a meaningful voice in the way their communities grow and prosper.

This morning I was pleased to announce the launch of an in-depth consultation on planning reform. Starting today, and over the next three months, our government will be consulting on Planning Act reform, which will build on the Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act I introduced last December, as well as on revised policies in the provincial policy statement and ideas for reforming the Ontario Municipal Board.

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How do these three pieces fit together? The provincial policy statement sets out the province's overall vision of growth and prosperity. It's where our government will define the priorities that we've all agreed upon, as well as the direction we all want Ontario to go.

Our goal is to have a provincial policy statement that effectively balances the needs of the economy, the environment and our communities. For example, the draft statement recognizes the importance of intensification and brownfields redevelopment, and states that municipalities should permit or facilitate all forms of redevelopment and plan infrastructure to support priority growth areas. Fundamentally, our government wants the new policy statement to lay the groundwork for wise decision-making and to provide the certainty that has been lacking with regard to where development should go and what must be protected.

Our Planning Act legislation is all about implementation. If passed, municipalities will be given the authority to make the changes they need to build their communities within the scope of our vision. You'll recall the legislation would introduce municipal leaders' ability to make the best choices for their constituents. It will also ensure planning decisions have to "be consistent with" the provincial policy statement, and not just "have regard to" it.

The OMB, as you know, is the appeal body. The OMB was created in 1897, and while Ontario is now a very different place, the basic mandate and functions of the board have remained the same for more than a century. This has led to some tough questions from the public and councils over the years, and our government is now working to address them through consultation.

We will look at such diverse issues as the public's ability to participate at OMB hearings. How can the public be better informed about the process at the OMB? Board member qualifications and their length of tenure will be studied. What can the board be doing to promote greater consistency in its decision-making process? Should the OMB's ability to substitute its decision for that of an elected council be modified or curtailed? We will look into the scope of matters which can be appealed to the OMB. Should the OMB continue to conduct de novo hearings looking at the full merits of a planning matter or be an appeal body based solely on matters that were brought before council at the time that it made its decision? Should we look at the breadth of the OMB mandate, which goes from the most complex development projects to the construction of your neighbour's deck, and whether that mandate is appropriate?

We look forward to receiving the input and opinions of experts, stakeholders and citizens on all of these issues at 13 public information sessions or directly to the ministry by letter or e-mail by August 31, 2004.

Ontarians are recognizing, as our government has also recognized, that the way we live tomorrow depends upon the way in which we plan and grow today. Policies such as growth management, a strong provincial policy statement, Planning Act reform and greenbelt protection will give us the balance we need for a healthy environment and a vibrant economy.

Together, we will build the strong communities that will provide Ontarians, now and in the future, with a quality of life that is second to none.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): To the government members, the Premier and the Attorney General in particular: You talk about real, positive change in the first line of the Premier's statement today. What we've got from this government in seven-plus months is partisan, negative political bafflegab and spin. And you wonder why voters are cynical and disillusioned.

You promised 231 things that you knew you couldn't possibly deliver on. You might have talked about them today.

You promised a referendum. If you raised taxes for any reason whatsoever, you promised a referendum. I'm surprised the Premier isn't standing in his place today announcing the date of the referendum.

Is it any wonder that 55% of Ontarians do not believe a single word this Premier says, with good reason to be disillusioned over the phony promises they made in last October's election? It's a good thing for you that the next one won't happen for another four years, because if you had the guts to put it on the line before then, you wouldn't be sitting over there.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I think the government is ahead of itself here today. They are talking about a vote four years down the road, when they should be calling one today.

One measure of political credibility is the extent to which elected leaders keep the commitments they make in seeking public office. The Premier has broken his promise of a referendum before he would raise taxes. He

is out of touch with the people of Ontario, who are saying and feeling, in communities across the province, that they're angry over tax hikes and the delisting of health care services in your budget. They feel betrayed by your repeated broken promises. If you'd only get outside of your bubble, you'd know they want to vote today, not four years down the road.

You promised a referendum. You and your Attorney General have a fundamental responsibility to obey the law of the land. Your legislation is nothing more than tinkering around the edges—a step toward the Americanization of our electoral process. It will do nothing to increase the number of people who vote, and it will do nothing to address the cynicism your government has created as a result of your broken promises. You betrayed the people of Ontario in your budget. You promised to hold the line on taxes and improve health care, but what did you do in the budget? You dramatically raised taxes and reduced access to health care by delisting needed services.

I see that you have adopted the date of October 4, 2007, called for in our critic's Bill 51, the Fixed Dates for Elections Act, 2004. In that bill, the member for Lanark-Carleton also included the need for a double majority before a non-confidence motion will lead to a provincial election. I hope this is something you have included in the bill. The member for Lanark-Carleton put in this bill a clause to ensure that a majority of the Legislature and a majority of the opposition supported any non-confidence motion that led to an election. This is important, because it would prevent a government from playing fast and loose with the rules, engineering a vote with the majority.

But again, the people of Ontario want to vote now. You promised a referendum if you increased taxes. It's a betrayal of the public trust that you are standing here today and not announcing a referendum date. You have failed to find ways to ensure that citizens are satisfied with the politicians they have elected, and you have failed with respect to the process to elect the politicians. Today's announcement won't do anything for democratic renewal. You must make good on your referendum promise. The people of Ontario deserve no less. Call a referendum today.

PLANNING REFORM

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In response to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the minister spoke for 10 minutes and said nothing. The minister is insulting every property owner in Ontario. He's insulting anyone who is in the development business. He's insulting every municipality. He's insulting every builder. The fact of the matter is that, through Bill 26, what this minister is really doing is politicizing the planning process. He is politicizing the Ontario Municipal Board. He and his government want to take back into the corridors of Queen's Park and into the cabinet room the decisions that should be made by an arm's-length, quasi-judicial organization such as the Ontario Municipal Board.

No one in this province believes a word that any minister in that government says. People in this province know that they cannot trust one word that comes out of the mouth of this Premier or out of any of the ministers. It is an unfortunate day in Ontario when even statements by ministers are held up as something not to be believed.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the members of the opposition. The reason I'm having difficulty hearing the opposition is that the government side keeps shouting. I'm going to have the third party respond now, and I'd like a bit more co-operation.

ELECTORAL REFORM
RÉFORME ÉLECTORALE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): First of all, let me say to the government that New Democrats support the announcement today to moving to fixed election dates. I say to some of my colleagues and friends in the media, no more winning bottles of wine from me on those bets. I always get the date wrong for when the election is going to be called. Now we know what we'll be doing on October 4, 2007.

Having said that, I do have to say to the government today that I've got your democratic renewal document here from the election. Where's the announcement today on your consultation and referendum on how we vote—proportional representation?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): It's coming.

Ms Churley: He says it's coming, but we were expecting it today. Tighter spending limits, mandatory public hearings for all legislation—we are looking forward to moving on that agenda, because it's very important. In fact, the archaic system that we have today—first past the post—no longer works for today's global economy and today's society. We need to make those changes.

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But most of all, why did the Liberals increase public cynicism by making promises they knew they couldn't keep? It's going to be that much harder now to pull people back and make this democratic renewal package that you want to bring forward relevant to people. But I'll tell you one promise you're going to inadvertently keep: You will get a higher vote out by at least 10%. People are so mad that they're going to come out in droves to throw you out of office on October 4, 2007. That's how you'll increase the vote by at least 10% or a whole lot more.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): La dernière élection, ce gouvernement libéral nous a dit, « Voyons; choisissez un changement. » Le seul choix que vous avez fait jusqu'à date est de briser vos promesses électorales que vous avez faites à la population ontarienne. Jusqu'à date, vous avez augmenté les taxes des citoyennes et des citoyens de cette province, quelque chose que vous aviez promis de ne pas faire. Vous avez choisi d'ôter du

système de santé les chiropracteurs et les oculistes, quelque chose que vous aviez promis de ne pas faire.

Aujourd'hui, vous venez ici—« On a besoin de la bonne nouvelle. » Comme ma collègue, je dis que oui, on est en faveur de votre proposition. Mais il faut garder très clairement dans l'esprit ce que le gouvernement fait, et regarder d'une manière très concrète comment ils seront capables de contourner l'opinion publique que ce gouvernement a formée jusqu'à date en brisant ses promesses. Je dis à ce point-ci, le seul choix que le public va maintenant avoir avec ce gouvernement est quand on peut chasser ces libéraux de l'office de l'Ontario.

PLANNING REFORM

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My comments are directed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I looked at this when I got it today; there are three of these papers. There is the Ontario Municipal Board planning reform initiatives, the provincial policy statement draft policies planning reform initiatives, and the Planning Act reform and implementation tools planning reform initiatives, all of which, with the greatest of respect, are consultation papers. They're consultation papers about things you should already know. You should already know what is happening out there, because I have heard many of you talk for so many years, when you sat on this side of the House, about what was wrong with the Ontario Municipal Board and the planning process. Instead, you've issued these, and all they are are open-ended questions. They're open-ended questions that give absolutely no direction to anyone reading them, as to where you are intending to take this province, so that they can intelligently answer those questions.

There are no policy initiatives. There are literally no directions. You should be providing leadership. That is one of the things that government should do: provide leadership and not go out and ask questions to answers you already know. You should be going to the public to say how they will be able to participate. You should be going out to the public to tell them how you can make the decisions of the Ontario Municipal Board consistent, not inconsistent the way they are written now. You have to go out to the public and tell them how you are going to scope the basis of appeal, which you're not doing here. You're merely asking them whether it should be scoped. You should already know the answers to that.

You've even asked the arcane questions of whether or not the appeals should be de novo hearings or whether they should be based on what has already been put there. We're saying that it should be an appeal. It should be an appeal straight out, an appeal on the information that has already been provided. There's no sense starting again. You already know that, and this is a sham.

SENIORS' MONTH

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes in recognition of seniors' awareness month.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent, as requested? Agreed.

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I am very pleased to speak as the minister responsible for seniors because, as you know, June is Seniors' Month, a celebration of this province's more than 1.5 million seniors, and a time to recognize the contributions that older Ontarians make to communities across the province.

This year's theme is, "Active Living: Active in Body, Mind and Spirit," and it is a theme that was clearly embodied by the seniors I met this morning. Earlier today, His Honour Lieutenant Governor John Bartleman and I participated in the Ontario Senior Achievement Award, when 21 outstanding Ontario seniors were recognized. These men and women were recognized for their contributions in the areas of arts and literature; environment and science; preservation of history; community service; fitness, recreation and sport; volunteerism; education; and humanitarian activities.

This year's award winners range in age from 69 to 95. Five are 90 years old or older. Each of the award winners is an excellent example of this year's theme of active living. They are an inspiration not only to other seniors but to all Ontarians. Their actions have enriched their communities and the lives of so many other people.

I encourage all members in the House to participate in as many Seniors' Month activities as possible in their communities. Better yet, I encourage them to organize activities themselves. The theme, "Active Living: Active in Body, Mind and Spirit," reminds us that regardless of one's ability we can all become more active in our communities with encouragement and support. When a person is active physically, emotionally, intellectually or spiritually, he or she is engaged and involved.

This year's theme also reminds us that when community members are healthy it has a positive impact on our community. Active living promotes good health, making for healthier Ontarians in a healthier Ontario.

Ontario seniors deserve to live safely, with dignity and as independently as possible with the supports they need. They have given their best to our province, and they deserve the best we can give back to them. This government's recently announced budget proposed a number of initiatives that will benefit seniors. They include an investment of $88 million in this year alone to expand home care, allowing individuals to remain in their own home environment as long as possible, and this will rise to $448 million over the course of the government's mandate; an additional $406 million of an investment in long-term-care facilities this year alone, which will improve the safety and quality of care provided to residents and fund the opening of 3,760 new beds announced by the previous government. As well, the government intends to enhance the Ontario property tax credit pro-

gram, increasing the maximum benefit for property and sales tax credits for seniors from $1,000 to $1,125.

Seniors have contributed to the safety and prosperity of this province, and they deserve to know about the programs and services in place to support them. One way of finding out about those programs and services is through public education and awareness events such as seniors' seminars. Seniors' Month provides an excellent opportunity to host a seniors' seminar. Seminars are available on a number of different topics, from investment fraud protection to safe medication use. To make arrangements for a seniors' seminar in your own communities, all members may contact the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat. The seminars are provided for seniors with valuable information on healthy aging and healthy lifestyles.

Seniors are increasingly connected to the Internet. Growing numbers of seniors, their families and caregivers are turning to the Internet for their information needs. That's why we've made a guide to programs and services in Ontario available on-line and in print. It is available in 10 different languages. Information from a variety of service providers and levels of government is listed in this useful guide, of which more than 100,000 copies have already been distributed to date.

This year's Seniors' Month also coincides with a very important anniversary. This marks the 60th anniversary of D-Day and the battle of Normandy. The province's official commemorative ceremony will take place at Queen's Park on June 6 at 4 o'clock. We have received an overwhelming response from veterans to attend the ceremony. We anticipate a large public turnout as well.

Ontario seniors have contributed to the growth, prosperity and safety of this province. For that, all Ontarians owe them a debt of gratitude.

1440

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I'm very pleased and proud to respond on this special occasion, Seniors' Month, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus and on behalf of, quite frankly, our government over the past eight years and their record in recognition of the changing landscape of our province that has been enriched by the growth of the number of senior citizens.

There are almost 1.6 million seniors in our province. By the year 2016, there'll be more seniors living in our province than children under the age of 14. By 2026, there'll be three million seniors—double the number. That is wonderful news for our province: an enriched demographic that our party recognized nine years ago when we had the responsibility to form a government. I was very pleased during that period of time to have been the minister responsible for seniors for five years and to sign on as a provincial signatory to Canada's national framework on aging, which set out the principles of dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security.

Our government was ably assisted by some very important organizations that should be mentioned on this day; in particular, the United Senior Citizens of Ontario, the Canadian Snowbird Association, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons and, of course, the Royal Canadian Legion, all working closely with our government in terms of developing a whole range of outstanding programs.

Today, it is fair to say that, of all Canadians, Ontarians enjoy the best of what any government can provide and a society can support within our nation here in our province. We were fortunate to be able to invest $1.6 billion, the largest long-term-care commitment of 20,000 new beds in North American history. It has never been duplicated by any other government: 16,000 older nursing homes torn down and completely rebuilt to the most modern standards in the world; $700 million in community care access, pushing us from fifth position to number one position, not only in Canada but across North America in terms of access to community care and community supports.

Our Alzheimer's strategy took four years to develop with an almost $70 million investment, the first of its kind in North America. Today, five years later, not one province or one state in the United States has come close to trying to duplicate the effort that this province has put in and is continuing to put in under the new government.

We have the portability of our drug benefits that we can be thankful for.

We have the elder abuse strategy, the first of its kind in the world, and Dr Elizabeth Podnieks should be commended. She delivered to the United Nations conference in Spain, to a standing ovation, that finally one jurisdiction in the world had a structured program involving all aspects of safety and security for our seniors.

The Memory Project to acknowledge our veterans was developed; our seniors' safe medication program—critically important, and I'm pleased to hear today that the minister is allowing that to continue. Ontario's seniors are the most overmedicated people on the face of the Earth. The average senior in this province is taking 12 to 16 drugs every single day of their lives. We're spending $2 billion outside of hospitals on medication. This is an incredible issue. I wish that our government had started, and I hope that some government will start, providing prescribing guidelines to better protect seniors in this province.

There are other issues, and we need to listen to our seniors. That's how we can learn from the advice they can give us. But they are concerned, because today many of them have spent their life savings protecting their largest investment, their home. They're house-rich but they're income-poor, and they're struggling to survive and stay in their home. This is a major issue, Minister, and one that has to be addressed. We believe strongly in property tax relief under the education envelope. That's not going to happen with your government. Hydro relief is another issue, because they are just not able to cope. The privatization of health care services, whether it's chiropractic, physio or optometry—all of these issues are causing seniors concern about their future and their

health needs. Prostate cancer tests are still being paid for. I raised on May 10 that zoledronic acid injections for palliative care for cancer patients were withdrawn by your government several months ago.

James Harrington, a retired OPP officer who was sexually assaulted by his case worker who was assisting him from a CCAC, has passed away. We need to change the Criminal Code to ensure that there can be a voice for seniors who die before the three years when their court cases can come forward.

There are many things we could still be doing to ensure that Ontario continues to be the greatest place in the world for us to celebrate the lives of our seniors.

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm very pleased and proud to be able to respond on the auspicious occasion of Seniors' Month on behalf of the third party. I want to say that seniors, we all know, are women and men who built our cities, built our towns and built our communities over the past decades in this province. In fact, they have been the architects of our very quality of life, our way of life in Ontario.

It's the quality of life we currently enjoy that we owe to the seniors of Ontario. It's that quality of life that the seniors of Canada have given us. These people have been the volunteers who have built our communities, who have built faith communities, who have helped in our recreation centres, in our clubs, who have helped with young people in tutoring for educational purposes. They are the people who are the very backbone of our families, our communities, our small businesses and our local organizations.

But I'm concerned, because I also know that these seniors, for the most part, are people on fixed incomes. These are people who are going to be affected very negatively by the policies of this government. They are people who are going to have their quality of life eroded with health premiums they can't afford. They are going to have problems because, basically, there are issues like pensions that this government refuses to address.

For example, there are opportunities here to show seniors how much we respect their contributions, and those opportunities will come in the form of things like guaranteed pension fund increases that this government could bring forward today to honour seniors. They could increase up to $2,500 the guaranteed pension fund for seniors, but I don't see that happening and I'm wondering why.

They could also be very well honoured by having changes and reforms to our pension system that allow pensions to be fully portable for seniors, not only existing seniors but all of us who will eventually be seniors in this province. That's progressive legislation that will really affect the quality of life of our seniors and will help them to know we really do mean what we say when we say we value the contribution of seniors.

Instead, what we have is a budget that came down that has nothing in it really for seniors. There is a pittance of contributions to affordable housing. We know that seniors are among the poorest in our province. In fact, women who are seniors are disproportionately represented in the ranks of the poor in this province. We don't see anything coming forward in regard to addressing the issues of affordable housing that would help those seniors to have a decent quality of life in this province.

We have serious concerns with our home care in Hamilton. Our CCAC has been into all kinds of cutbacks, all kinds of restrictions, yet it's going to be another year before this province will help the city of Hamilton in regard to the home care problems we are having in helping our seniors maintain their stability and quality of life. As a member of city council, I fought very desperately year after year in our budgets to make sure we didn't cut back on home care, even though it was a provincial responsibility.

The poverty of seniors is staggering. The lack of anything in this budget is frightening, and yet we're all standing here saying we honour our seniors. Quite frankly, I do honour our seniors, but when they are facing hydro increases that are untenable, when their cars are parked because they can no longer afford insurance premiums, when their property taxes are going over the roof, that is not the kind of action that indicates we support our seniors.

What I can say about our seniors, though, is that my experience is that seniors are a very interesting group of people because they like to take people at their word. They're kind of traditionalists in that way. They take people at their word. They believe in the integrity of a handshake, in the integrity of a promise. Boy, are our seniors disappointed by the broken promises of this government in the last budget they just tabled.

1450

HANSARD REPORTING SERVICE

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: In accordance with the standing orders, this is the first opportunity I've had to raise a question with respect to an item that appears in the Hansard of May 20, as I was not in the House yesterday.

Briefly, I wish to have the Speaker investigate the degree to which statements made in the House can be altered on their way to Hansard and find their way in the final version. In particular, I would like to draw your attention to page 2390 from Hansard on May 20. I asked a question of the minister responsible for municipal affairs and seniors. In his response, clearly we understood that it was a misstatement that he said, "Under our budget nothing could be further from the truth." It was recalled by many people. It is on the tape. The actual reference in Hansard has been changed to, "What the member is suggesting couldn't be further from the truth."

I would simply ask, Mr Speaker, if you could advise the House of the changes in the ability for members to change what is put in Hansard, because my understanding is, those rules are far tighter than what would appear in this documentation I share with you today. I would ask the Speaker to look into the matter. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you for bringing that to our attention. I will take that under advisement and respond to that.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): Premier, last week, the Prime Minister said that when you make a promise—or 231 of them, for that matter—you should not break them, and that he would not break faith with the people of the province of Ontario as you did, nor should elected members over-promise. Will you now do the right thing and cancel your punitive health tax and re-list essential public services in health care that you have delisted, or don't you think you've helped Stephen Harper quite enough yet?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I am very proud to report to the leader of the official opposition and to the people of Ontario that we are doing the right thing. We've introduced a brand new piece of legislation, the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, and it will ensure that no government ever again can go into an election while at the same time hiding the truth from the people of Ontario when it comes to the state of the government's finances.

Mr Eves: When told that Mr Martin had promised $9 billion-plus for the health care system in Canada, and asked if he would then cancel his health tax, the Premier's response was: "We've got a campaign promise made in the thick of a campaign. Let's wait to see what the outcome of the campaign is so we can better determine exactly what we're going to end up with." What are we to infer from that, Mr Premier: You don't believe Paul Martin, and the $9 billion is not coming, or you think Paul Martin's going to lose the election, and therefore you're not counting on the $9 billion?

Hon Mr McGuinty: One thing that I can say without hesitation when it comes to Prime Minister Paul Martin is that he is not hiding a $6-billion deficit from the people of Canada, unlike what happened before.

Mr Eves: Then why don't you trust him?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Final supplementary.

Mr Eves: I say to the Minister of Health, my cheque for $76,000 was paid, which is more than I can say for the current Treasurer. If you want to start talking about cheques, let's have it with interest for about five years.

Here's another quote of yours, Mr Premier: "I gave the Prime Minister a heads-up—no doubt about it—with respect to the challenge that the budget would present and the fact that it would contain a health care premium." Mr Premier, do you think it's appropriate for you to breach the principle of budget confidentiality to give someone a political heads-up? Laugh all you want.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The Leader of the Opposition embraces an outdated policy that says that in each and every instance it is the responsibility of the Premier of Ontario to pick a fight with the government of Canada, even if that compromises the interests of the people of Ontario. We reject that approach. We're working with the federal government to advance the cause of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I recently spoke to a single mother living in Barrhaven in my constituency, and she wanted me to ask you a question. She says that, after paying her rent, after paying her car payment and insurance, after paying her taxes and after feeding and clothing her two children, she just doesn't have the $600 to pay for your new health tax. Where is she supposed to get the money to pay for that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I think that the constituent whom the member opposite makes reference to is entitled to know a few things about what happened when the Tories put out their first budget in this Legislature. Let's remember—this from the member opposite who now champions the cause of the disadvantaged—in the Tories' first government they reduced welfare by 21.6%, they eliminated second-stage housing for women who found themselves in desperate circumstances, they fired one third of the Ministry of the Environment staff and slashed the budget by 42%. This now from the member opposite, who pretends to champion the public interest and, in particular, the disadvantaged.

Mr Baird: Premier, that's going to be cold comfort to my constituent.

I want to come back to this question. This constituent of mine is working hard. She's playing by the rules, like many other working families in Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Could I have some order, please. Thank you. Member from Nepean-Carleton.

Mr Baird: That's certainly cold comfort to my constituent, a single mother who, after paying the rent, after paying her car and insurance bills, after providing for her family, just doesn't have the money to pay for this tax. So I want to ask you very directly, Premier: Where is this single mother in my constituency to find $600 after paying her taxes and paying all the bills? Where is she to find that money, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite simply doesn't want to acknowledge the assistance we're providing to his constituent and many others like her throughout the province. In particular, we are, for the first time in our province, going to fund an immunization program that puts us at the top when it comes to provinces and territories. We're going to fund inocul-

ations against meningitis, pneumococcal disease and chickenpox. For one child alone that will save parents $600. We happen to believe that investing in that kind of program in the interests of Ontario children is the right thing to do. Apparently, the member opposite is against us funding immunization programs for children in the province of Ontario.

Mr Baird: Premier, you said, not more than five weeks ago, and I'm going to quote, "Well, what we've said all along, and I'm very clear about this, is that we're not going to raise taxes." You said that on April 24. What people in Ontario want to know is, why didn't you go to Paul Martin, the man who cut $25 billion out of our nation's health care system, before you picked the pockets of working families in Ontario? What my constituents want to know is why the federal government wasn't called to task for their health care cuts? You see, Premier, in the federal election campaign going on, for Liberal MPPs in Ontario your budget is a weapon of mass political destruction. Why won't you go to Paul Martin and say you want him to put the money back that he stole from Ontario hospitals, that he took from Ontario nurses, before you go after working families in south Nepean and across Ontario? Why don't you do that?

1500

Hon Mr McGuinty: The Tory deficit is an example—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Would you allow the Premier to respond, please?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Government House leader, could I ask you to come to order, please?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Some people will say anything to try to get in on the federal election news, but we've got some good news here. We look forward to talking about it a lot more in the months to come.

Because of our budget and the difficult choices that we have made—and, yes, we are enlisting the people of Ontario in improving the quality of their health care services—these are just some of the things we'll be able to do for the people of Ontario: 36,000 more cardiac procedures; 2,300 more joint replacements; 9,000 more cataract surgeries; 8,000 more full-time nursing positions; 150 family health teams. We think that is a worthwhile investment on behalf of the people of Ontario.

Applause.

The Speaker: Order. I find that the disruption on each side has robbed others of their questions. I also think that standing up and applauding deprives others of asking questions.

TAXATION

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I hope to tone this down a little, but I do have a very serious question about the budget. My question is to the Premier. There is a rebellion across this province, quite literally, of people who are upset about the tax grab from your budget. They are furious at the unfairness, where a middle-income person pays up to 16% extra of their taxes, while a bank executive who earns over $200,000 pays less than a 3% increase in theirs. They're furious that the capital tax on banks and other large corporations is going away, that they're getting a break, while they are forced to dig deeper and deeper into their pockets.

Why don't you just come out and admit to seniors and working families that they are going to be out of pocket $200, $300, $500, up to $1,000 because you chose to side with the banks and the wealthy, and not with them?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): It's passing strange that the member opposite raises a question about the profits being generated by corporations, yet he voted against our decision to roll back corporate taxes in the province of Ontario.

The member opposite and the opposition parties are apparently opposed to our budget. I'm just trying to figure out which part of our budget they're opposed to. Are they opposed to the additional cardiac procedures? Are they opposed to additional joint replacements? Are they opposed to more cataract surgeries? Are they opposed to lower class sizes? Are they opposed to 1,000 new teachers? Are they opposed to lead teachers for literacy and numeracy in our classrooms? We think, when the real story gets out to the people of Ontario, they will embrace this budget and the improvements in health care and education that will flow from this.

Mr Prue: We, on this side of the House, don't believe you any more than the people of Ontario believe you outside this House. Will you just admit who wins and who loses in your budget? We put it to you that people lose and the corporations win. This is a grossly unfair budget, when a bank clerk will pay $450 in new taxes and the bank for whom she works—the bank of Montreal made $602 million in profit in this past quarter—gets further big-time tax cuts. My question to you: In the most important decision of your young government, in the seven or eight months you've been here, you have sided with the banks and against seniors and working families. Why did you do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, this was from a member belonging to a party that chose to vote against our decision to roll back corporate tax cuts. But I want to remind the member opposite of something about the first NDP government budget. In that particular budget, the then-NDP government decided they were going to hike gas taxes by 3.4 cents a litre. I ask the member opposite, is that progressive? Does that help our most disadvantaged who are struggling to make ends meet? We think not.

What we have done instead is that we have increased welfare rates in the province of Ontario. We've increased rates for people who find themselves on disability. We are helping people out when it comes to managing their rent responsibilities. We're doing all kinds of things to improve the quality of public education and the quality of public health care. These may not be easy decisions, but I can tell you they are the right decisions.

Mr Prue: With the greatest of respect, it doesn't take great leadership to go after the poor. Workers and the

poor across this province know they have been the subject of a tax grab. They know that a worker earning $45,000 will pay an additional 1.25% in taxes this year. They know that an executive earning $500,000 will pay only 0.18% on that same tax bill.

We are asking you to simply do the right thing. You've said so many times "the right thing and the fair thing." We're asking you to finally do it, to rescind your health tax and make those who can afford to pay it actually be responsible to pay it.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite takes it upon himself to be a defender of our disadvantaged, as if somehow they have a monopoly when it come to social consciousness in Ontario. This budget and steps we have taken to this point in time prior to the budget advance the cause of our least advantaged in the province a great deal.

On the matter of seniors alone, I can tell you that seniors, when we tell them that we are going to provide thousands more cardiac procedures, thousands more hip and knee replacements, thousands more cataract surgeries and thousands more full-time nursing positions, that 100,000 more Ontarians are going to benefit from home care, that when we improve the quality of care in our nursing homes for the 70,000 of our parents and grandparents who take up residence there and who are living out their lives there—when they are made aware of those investments we are making, I can tell you that they embrace the idea that for the first time in a long time they've got a government that is on the job and doing the right thing when it comes to health care and education.

1510

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Premier. We've discovered a dirty little secret buried in your bad-news budget. Not only are you imposing an unfair health tax and not only are you delisting essential health services, but now we find that your budget makes it easier to delist drugs. That's right. Your bill amends section 20 of the Ontario Drug Benefit Act to allow the health minister to take drugs off the formulary without going to cabinet. Your minister will be able to wipe out people's access to drugs behind closed doors. My question is, why are you making it easier to take away people's access to drugs?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I hope that the additional research dollars will be of some benefit, sooner rather than later.

We made a very specific commitment during the campaign to accelerate the process by which we can introduce generic drugs on to the formulary. That is the sole purpose of this provision as it's contained within the budget, to accelerate the introduction of generic drugs on to the formulary. That will save Ontario taxpayers money and provide good-quality care to Ontarians.

Ms Churley: Premier, I believe what you can put on, you can also take off. If that's not the point, you can clarify that, but that's my understanding from reading it. Apparently it wasn't enough to delist—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'm just trying to get the House leader to be a little bit quieter so I can hear you.

Ms Churley: The public can hear me, Mr Speaker, and that's what counts here.

It wasn't enough to delist eye exams, chiropractic services and physiotherapy. Now you want to let the health minister delist prescription drugs that people depend on, and you want to do it secretly, behind the closed doors of the health ministry, without so much as cabinet approval. Yet this change, interestingly enough, was accompanied by no announcement. It wasn't even mentioned in the explanatory notes of the bill. Premier, tell us which drugs you're going to delist first. The people of Ontario deserve to know.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I disagree entirely with the member opposite's version or interpretation of this particular provision. One of the things the Provincial Auditor referenced in the past was the fact that because it takes us so long to substitute a generic for a name brand drug, it's coming at great expense to the people of Ontario. All we've done through this particular provision is enable the minister to fast-track the introduction of generics. That's what this is all about. There is no hidden agenda. There is nothing that we're trying to do that is beyond that. It's simply to provide better-quality care at a faster pace for the people of Ontario. It's a good thing.

Ms Churley: Premier, if you can list with this amendment, you can delist. So here you are, bringing in a huge health tax on working people after you wouldn't—

Interjections.

Ms Churley: Excuse me. Here you are bringing in a huge health tax on working people after saying you wouldn't. That was bad enough. You'd think that delisting important health services was bad enough, but your secret plan to delist prescription drugs takes the cake. But that's the way you Liberals do things, isn't it? You claim to be champions of health care, and you stand up there and say that today, but you're sneakily making it easier to take away their access to affordable prescription drugs. Yet again, another broken Liberal promise.

Premier, for the sake of the people who depend on prescription drugs, will you commit today to delete this amendment so the health minister will not have free rein to take drugs off the formulary, which is what this amendment will allow him to do?

Hon Mr McGuinty: There's an inability here to shift on the fly. The member opposite is just not prepared to accept my answer. I want to assure her, but more importantly I want to assure the people she might have caused to worry today, that the purpose of this particular provision is simply to allow the Minister of Health to move more quickly when it comes to introducing generics into the formulary. That is the beginning and the end of the purpose when it comes to this provision.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. Your reputation as someone who is untrustworthy is crossing provincial borders. Yesterday, even the Prime Minister was asked by a high school student in Saskatoon how anyone could possibly believe him when people couldn't believe the Premier of Ontario in keeping his promise.

But we don't have to look to Saskatoon and high school students; we just have to look at the Premier's own backbench for doubts about his credibility. On his first day back in the riding following the budget, the member for Prince Edward-Hastings told CJBO Radio that he strongly disagreed with his own government's budget for delisting physiotherapy, chiropractic and optometry services. That member, Mr Parsons, said that he would fight hard to ensure that these delistings were reinstated. I want to ask the Premier: Has Mr Parsons spoken to you about this, and how will you respond to him?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): It's important to understand that in order for us to make important investments in health care, we've had to call upon the people of Ontario to help us make those investments. We've also made some difficult decisions with respect to services we were already delivering. But it's important to know what the truth is with respect to these. When it comes to optometry services, for example, we will continue to provide coverage for all Ontarians over the age of 65 and under the age of 20. And all medically necessary eye examinations will continue to be covered, regardless of the patient's age.

Mr Klees: There's a rift in the Liberal caucus. The fact of the matter is that Mr Parsons made a very clear statement that he would take this matter to the Premier. In fact, Mr Parsons—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Klees: It's not just Mr Parsons who's opposing the budget. Kim Craitor, the member for Niagara Centre, told the Niagara Falls Review that he wanted to find some way to reverse that delisting as well. Both of these members—certainly Mr Parsons said there will be public meetings and that he will personally undertake in those public hearings to oppose those measures. I want to ask the Premier, who spoke about democratizing this place—in fact, earlier on he said, "Let's wait to see when the people of Ontario get to understand this budget"—will you commit today to having public hearings on this budget and give Mr Parsons an opportunity to oppose this, as he said he would?

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): On a point of order, Speaker: I was actually there when I spoke, and I would be pleased to supply a transcript. I did not say that.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Interjections.

Mr Klees: Now you're lying about that too.

Interjections.

The Speaker: We'll take a five-minute recess.

The House recessed from 1519 to 1524.

The Speaker: Just before the recess, the member from Oak Ridges commented on something unparliamentary. I would ask him to withdraw.

Mr Klees: I withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you. Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Speaker, I frankly can't recall what the question was. If the member wants to put it again—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member from the third party now, the member from Hamilton East. New question.

PENSION PLANS

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Premier. I represent a community where people are very worried about their pensions. In fact, steelworkers in particular in Hamilton East are very worried about their pensions and whether they will be able to enjoy financially secure retirement. They're worried because Ontario pension protection legislation is badly out of date and full of holes. In fact, the coverage provided by Ontario's pension benefits guarantee fund has not been updated since 1980 and now covers only a small part of a typical monthly pension benefit.

Premier, will you act immediately to significantly increase the monthly pension benefit protected by the pension guarantee fund? Yes or no?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): First of all, let me take the opportunity, because it is my first opportunity, to congratulate the member opposite and to welcome her to this Legislature. It is my sincere hope that she'll never lose her idealism.

Having said that, I'm sure the member will want to recognize that the challenges that are connected with people who are relying on pensions from Stelco developed as a result of her party, in 1992, changing the Pension Benefits Act and exempting Stelco from the requirement they used to have to make ongoing contributions. The reason those pensioners are at risk today is because of steps taken by the NDP government.

Ms Horwath: The people of Hamilton East didn't buy that argument several weeks ago; in fact, the people of Hamilton East sent a clear message to your government on May 13. They expect their government to be at the table fighting for them, not rewriting history; not making excuses, passing the buck and breaking promises. In fact, they are watching your government very closely on the security of their pensions. So I'm going ask you one more time, Mr Premier: Are you going to be a part of the solution and take action to protect pensions, or are you going to sit this one out too?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, the member is going to have to, at some point in time, stop providing her idiosyncratic version of history here and tell her constituents why they find themselves in this particular fix. They find themselves in this mess because of a misstep taken by the NDP government.

We are working with the workers and with the company itself. We've assigned an individual, Jim Arnett, whose responsibility is to report to us on an ongoing basis. We are taking the necessary steps to ensure that we can provide assistance to those workers when called upon and support the company in any way we can. But what we will not do is take the step that was taken by the NDP government in the past, which is to exempt companies when it comes to making their continuing contributions to pension plans.

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): My question is to the Minister of Health. As you know, the residents of northern Ontario face unique challenges in providing and accessing health care. Yesterday, you and the Premier joined people from across northwestern Ontario in celebrating the official opening of the new Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre and making an important announcement related to the hospital as well as another major announcement in Sudbury later in the day. There is no question that hospital boards across the north work hard to raise their share of project costs from a much smaller resource pool, but at the same time, these northern hospitals, such as the ones in Thunder Bay and Sudbury, largely because of the geographical realities in our part of the province, must provide a wide range of services to people from outlying communities, often living hundreds of kilometres away. Minister, what assurances can you give to the residents of the north that the government of Ontario is paying attention to these very unique circumstances?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Yesterday I was honoured to attend in northern Ontario, with the Premier, two important announcements at the two regional hospitals that are the anchors of the health care system in northwestern and northeastern Ontario. We made an unprecedented funding arrangement, a commitment on the part of the government to provide 80% of the capital costs of construction of the new facilities in each of those two communities. We did so because they play a unique role in the delivery of health care in our province, unique because they're both regional trauma centres, because they're both regional cancer centres, because they're both the tertiary care centres for the entire regions and because they're connected to the important Northern Ontario Medical School, which we're very proud to be moving forward on. We recognized that those communities and their tax base are not capable of raising all the money necessary to provide services over that vast and remote area, so we moved forward.

Let me close by saying this is the kind of initiative that's made possible by a government which has made the difficult but necessary decision to make sure that Ontarians have enough health care resources to build on the strengths of their health care system.

1530

Mr Gravelle: Thank you very much, Minister and Premier. On behalf of the residents of northeastern and northwestern Ontario, we're very grateful for this understanding of our needs. The members of my community and the region are very pleased that this government is willing to take the bold steps necessary to improve health care in Ontario.

As you understand so well, northern Ontario has a variety of challenges with respect to health care. But there has been much talk about our health-first budget and how it will affect Ontarians. My supplementary today is, how will our health-first budget affect people in the north?

Hon Mr Smitherman: The essential transformation in our health care budget is a drive to community, an investment in five significant areas of community supports, all designed to divert traffic from our hospitals, which we all know have been asked to do too much over the last number of years.

In areas where remoteness is such an issue, which are, of course, most prevalent in northern Ontario, it's increasingly clear that the direction we've taken, the transformation agenda that we've fuelled as a government—more resources for home care, for long-term care, for primary care reform, for public health that works, for mental health and addiction treatment services. These five things combined fuel a transformation agenda that I like to call a drive to community to provide treatment for people in their homes, as close to home as possible.

This is what our budget was all about, the transformation agenda that we're fuelling on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario and, I think, with a special application in the most remote areas of our province, northern Ontario.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): It's amazing how quickly that hospital got built.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): That's right. That's a good hospital that we built.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order, Minister of Community and Social Services. That must be a good hospital.

The member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Mrs Witmer: My question is for the Premier. For a government that claims on its Web site that it wants to focus on illness prevention and health promotion, the shift that you've made and the elimination of OHIP coverage for eye exams is certainly a backward step. In fact, Judith Parks of the Ontario Association of Optometrists says that without access to eye exams, which

identify early warning signs of eye disease, "People will go blind that need not. The health and safety of our patients will suffer."

Premier, why are you putting the health and safety of patients at risk by introducing greater privatization and two-tier health care and delisting eye exams for people between the ages of 21 to 64?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the Minister of Health would like to speak to this.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think it's important to note right off the bat that as a result of the initiatives we've taken with respect to optometry, which no doubt are difficult decisions, Ontario is now aligned with all other provinces in our country. What we've done is reach out to protect those who are most vulnerable by making sure that our seniors and young people have access to those services and that in any instance that is medically necessary there will be access to those services.

There is absolutely no doubt that there were hard choices as a result of our budget, but what the honourable member doesn't speak to is the significant $600-million investment over four years in primary care reform for those one million Ontarians who, as a result of your eight failed years, did not have a family doctor. We bring forward a model of hope that has an interdisciplinary team approach of people working in partnership to make sure that those Ontarians, whom the member now has concern for, actually have access to the most essential health services in this province.

Mrs Witmer: I would say to the Minister of Health that nobody believes you any more. This is the man who introduced a Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act and is now decreasing access to health care services, not based on need on but people's ability to pay. You should be ashamed of yourself.

I'd like to read a letter from Kate MacNaughton. She says the "Ontario government's delisting of preventive and maintenance health services is about to hurt my family.... We ... don't visit the dentist" because they can't afford it. Now, they're not going to be able to go and have eye exams.

The Speaker: Question.

Mrs Witmer: And she says, "Screening for glaucoma and detached retina is part of a general eye exam. We are not in a position to pay for general eye exams so your legislation will put them out of our reach. As a result ... we face ... personal ramifications." They can't afford the huge bills. What do you say to people like Kate MacNaughton?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I say to the honourable member that she ought to be ashamed. Let me quote Doris Grinspun: "I'm delighted with the focus on health care and even more delighted with the focus on real transformation of the system"—home health care, primary health care, long-term care and public health. The point simply is: 100 million new dollars for community care; 406 million new dollars for long-term care; 600 million new dollars for primary care; 65 million new dollars for community-based mental health and addiction supports; and a signature investment in public health that is the proactive kind of health care, the preventive kind of health care that Ontarians have been waiting for for a long time. One final point—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Premier. Do you have a copy of your budget bill in your desk? If you do, I would advise you to take it out and turn to page 13. I'm going to read to you what section 20(1) of your budget bill says. The heading says "Delisting," and it's subsection 20(1): "The Lieutenant Governor in Council or the minister may remove the designation of a drug product as a listed drug product even if none of the conditions prescribed under clause 18(1)(b.1) are breached." Premier, could you comment on that section that is headed by the word "Delisting?"

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): To the Minister of Health.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As the Premier well said on this point earlier, the clear intent of this section is to bring forward the gold standard for the province of Ontario on the fast-tracking of generics on to the formulary. We continue to rely, in this province, on the drug quality therapeutic committee for any advice with respect to the delisting of products. I'm pleased to confirm for the member that the intent of this section is for the fast-tracking of generics to make sure that Ontarians have prompt access to these drugs and to the benefit of the taxpayers.

Ms Churley: I believe that the Premier and the Minister of Health owe the fine researchers in the NDP department an apology, because they got this right. You're the ones who need researchers over there. You're getting section 20(1) mixed up with section 18, which is the section the Premier so proudly displayed in here. That's the section that's in there to add drugs. Premier, you have, under section 20 a specific clause that allows your Minister of Health to secretly delist drugs. Do you know why we're worried? Because he's in the process of negotiating with the OMA right now.

I want to ask you again, which drugs are you planning to delist? Come clean with the people of Ontario today, and tell us.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I think the evidence is clear from a budget that increases by some $300 million the amount of money we're going to make available for the provision of drugs in Ontario that our intent is only to enhance the quality of our drug formulary. In the initiative that we're involved in, the intent is absolutely clear. It is the fast-tracking of generic drugs for the purpose of making sure that the government of Ontario takes advantage, at the earliest date possible, once the federal

government has done their piece, to make sure we've got those cheap drugs available as quickly as possible for the benefit of our health care system. That is the intent of the section.

1540

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is for the Minister of Labour. I've heard from constituents in my riding who are concerned about asbestos in construction workplaces. The health hazards associated with asbestos are far too familiar. Exposure to airborne asbestos fibres is known to cause respiratory conditions and various forms of cancer. Employers have a responsibility under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect the health and safety of construction workers in Ontario. Minister, what are you going to do to improve workplace safety and protect Ontario's construction workers from asbestos exposure?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): The member for Peterborough asks a very important question. I'd like to thank him for his tireless efforts in defence of workers, in defence of workplace safety.

First of all, the asbestos regulation covering workers in construction has not been updated for some time, unlike the general asbestos regulation. That potentially means that the regulation does not reflect the best scientific and medical evidence. So what we're doing is two things. First of all, we are providing a notice advisory to all workers in construction—new construction and repair—so they will be aware of some of the best scientific advances so that this summer, as they're working, they'll be protected. The second thing we're doing, and this is important for the member to know, is asking for input on a draft new regulation so we can better update the regulation and make sure workers in Ontario working with asbestos in construction are fully and properly protected.

Mr Leal: I'm pleased to hear you're addressing the serious problem of asbestos exposure on construction projects and in building and repair operations. The statistics of workplace injuries are alarming. According to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, every week in Ontario 5,400 people suffer from preventable work-related injury, including 1,800 injuries serious enough to make the workers miss time on the job. Three people suffer amputations, two people die from work-related injuries and four people die from occupational illnesses. It is truly a shame that injury seems to be a consequence for so many people in our workforce. What is your ministry doing to protect workers from injury in the workplace?

Hon Mr Bentley: I thank the member for the supplementary. Once again, he's focusing on the number one priority of the Ministry of Labour, which is to make sure our workplaces are as safe and healthy as anywhere in the world.

What are we doing? First of all, we're stepping up enforcement. We've hired 25 inspectors, and we're looking to see what else we can do. Second, we have ended telephone-only inspections of workplace work refusals that the previous government instituted. We've ended that program. Third, we're working with farm groups, labour groups and the Ministry of Agriculture to bring in health and safety regulations for the farm agriculture community in this province. Next, we have made the occupational health clinic in Sarnia a permanent member of the OHCOW family, which will protect workers in that community. Finally, we have updated the occupational exposure limits to make sure all workers and workplaces in the province are fully and properly protected.

BUDGET SECURITY

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Premier. We know that the co-chair of the federal Liberal election campaign, David Herle, provided your government with his taxpayer-funded advice on your recent budget. Your finance minister has indicated that Mr Herle, despite his advice to break your no-tax-increase promise, was not provided with any budgetary details. This is in stark contrast to your public admission that you informed Liberal Prime Minister Martin of budget contents. Premier, given parliamentary conventions surrounding budget secrecy, can you advise us what exceptions permitted you to give advance notice of budget contents to your Liberal cousin?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The leader of the official opposition raised this just a short while ago. I answered it at that time, and my answer remains the same: We feel we have a responsibility to stay in touch with the federal government, of whatever political stripe, and we did that in that particular case.

With respect to Mr Herle, there are a number of precedents for retaining people who provided the kind of assistance they did in that particular matter. I'm quite prepared to provide those examples, taken from the previous government.

Mr Runciman: That's a clear violation of parliamentary convention in place since the 19th century, and it's clear that the government's operating motto is one rule for the general public, another for your Liberal friends. Premier, if I can get a page, I'm going to send over a copy of the oath you swore when you became Premier. It states, "I will respect as secret all matters that may be discussed by the executive council, and not disclose outside the council any facts pertaining to such matters."

Premier, you've proven your signature to be worthless. Does your admitted breach of your oath, as a member of the executive council, justify your stepping aside from your responsibilities? You wouldn't accept this from any other member of the executive council; why would you live with it yourself? Will you step aside, following this breach of your oath?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite now holds himself out as a champion of parliamentary tradition, and

yet he belonged to a government that, for the first time in the history of parliamentary tradition, introduced a budget in an auto parts factory. That's the kind of defence we have for parliamentary tradition. I will take no lectures, when it comes to this gentleman, on the matter of parliamentary tradition.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the Premier, and it's with regard to the new water regulations that are hurting, I would say, thousands of small businesses across all of northern Ontario. I want to bring but one example before the House today.

I have a letter from a Mr Krupka, who is the owner of Notre Dame Trailer Park. He sends me this letter in order to outline what your new water regulations are going to mean to him. He is looking at capital costs of $159,000 this year in order to bring the trailer park up to the standards of the new water regulation, with an additional cost of some $26,000 per year of ongoing maintenance.

My question to you is simply this: What is your government going to do, either by way of regulation or funding, in order to deal with this so Mr Krupka is not in the position of other small business owners in the north of having to close their businesses because they can't afford to do this?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): To the Minister of the Environment.

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I'm happy again to have the opportunity to address this very important issue in the Legislature. We've heard from people across the province of Ontario. We have listened to the people of Ontario, unlike the previous government, with respect to regulation 170.

At the present time, we have delayed the requirement for those who would be affected on July 1 of this year, until December 31 of this year. In the meantime, we are consulting with municipalities, we are consulting with campground associations, or associations representing campgrounds, trailer parks and so on, as well as the Ontario Medical Association, to ensure that a new regimen that will, in fact, regulate water sources and trailer parks and other municipal sources of water in the province of Ontario will be able to provide safe water to the people that they serve.

1550

Mr Bisson: I wouldn't argue, as a New Democrat, for one second that we have to make sure we have safe water regulations for all Ontarians, but it's the effect that it's having on small businesses. This particular business went to borrow money from the bank in order to buy equipment, to buy a backhoe to do maintenance within his trailer park. He was told, and I quote from his letter: "I wanted to purchase a backhoe loader at a cost of $28,000 this year. The bank loans officer turned down the request for this purchase, as he rationalized that although my revenue was higher, my expenses" this year, because of the regulation, when the regulation comes into place, would be higher.

You might have delayed it, but the business owners themselves are not able to borrow money because of the regulation that's still out there and looming over their heads. Will you clarify this issue once and for all, so that small business owners in the north are not faced with what Mr Krupka is faced with; that is, an inability to borrow money from the bank because of the impending costs the regulations have on their businesses?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: What has been committed to in this Legislature is that the Minister of the Environment will be working over the next months, and in the fall we will be introducing a regulation that we believe will be more user-friendly and will also ensure the safety of water for the people of Ontario. In terms of telling him what the costs are going to be, that is yet to be determined. We have yet to receive that input.

This government is about consulting with the people who will be impacted. We will be consulting with the Ontario Medical Association to ensure that in the fall, when we bring in a new regulation or an improved regulation, it will be manageable for the people of Ontario so they can provide safe water to people in their community.

CLASS SIZE

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My question is for the Minister of Education. Our government was elected, and we are committed, to bring about real, positive change to public education in Ontario. Parents, students and teachers in my riding of Huron-Bruce are very concerned about their schools and the quality of education they receive.

Capping class sizes in the early grades is an issue that I know is very dear not only to our Premier's heart, but to yours, Minister, as well. Research has shown that the benefits of a hard cap are many, and my constituents are very supportive of this policy. During the election, our government promised a hard cap of 20 students during the all-important early grades. Can you tell us when you expect this hard cap to be implemented?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I thank the member opposite. I know that she, like other members in this House, replaced members who weren't concerned enough about how well students, particularly young students in our schools, would have a chance to go forward. I'm very pleased to report back to her, and through her to her constituents, that our government is committing, over four years, $2.6 billion in new investment in education, $854 million in this year alone, because this is a government not afraid to make tough choices on behalf of this province, kids who are lost in classrooms made too large by inattentive governments in the past—in fact, governments for some time—that did not give the advantage that education in Ontario should have to offer.

I want to report to the member that reduction in class sizes will begin this September in schools and school

boards all across this province. There will be over 1,100 new teachers deployed in the primary division, paying the attention to students that wouldn't be given by the governments that preceded us.

Mrs Mitchell: Research has shown that children who learn in smaller classes in our early grades learn better and also develop better social skills. All parents want to give their children the absolute best start. Many have said that capping class sizes is one way we can do that. Some parents in my riding are unclear about what the benefits of our hard cap of 20 students from JK to grade 3 will be for our children. Minister, can you tell us what implications this cap will have on students later in their learning careers and later in their lives?

Hon Mr Kennedy: Again, an excellent question, and excellent interest on the member's part, one that couldn't occur through previous governments because they weren't focused on what will make a difference. Making sure that individualized attention happens to students, which we will bring to 20 by the end of our term, will make sure they get their advantages recognized sooner, that they get individualized attention so their challenges are identified and dealt with at a time that is not only beneficial to them but most economical for the system. It will make sure that parents aren't competing with as many sets of parents to do their job, which has to happen from the earliest time possible.

We find lower discipline problems, learning advantages and better performance on behalf of students.

Right now in this province, the legacy under the previous government—150,000 young primary children are in classes of 26 or more, where they don't even do research because they know how hopeless it is for kids in those situations. It was ignored once by governments in the past. It was not seen to be a priority—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

BUDGET SECURITY

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I'd like to go back to the Premier. A few years ago, the Premier was part of a group of baying hounds calling for my resignation over the possible identification of a young offender in this Legislature. As he will recall, I did resign. Eight short months ago, Premier, you placed your hand on a Bible and swore an oath to the people of Ontario. Part of that oath deals with secrecy of cabinet discussions.

What standard of integrity are you setting for the people of this province, for the people of this country, when you have, in effect, torn this thing up and thrown it on the floor? What does the oath of allegiance mean? What does it mean to the other members of the executive council when you can simply deny it? Your signature doesn't mean anything. Now the oath of allegiance with your hand on the Bible doesn't mean anything. Shameful.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Speaker: Is it in order for documents to be thrown around the Legislature? It seems to me that if there was a legitimate question, the opposition wouldn't have to engage in such childish stunts.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That is not a point of order.

Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I really do appreciate the dramatic flourish. I guess, from the member's perspective, with any luck at all, it will get him on TV tonight. But I want to again make the point that we bring a decidedly different approach to our relationship to the federal government than did the previous government. We happen to believe it's important to communicate from time to time with the federal government. We happen to believe it's important to lay down a good foundation, a good relationship, so that we can work together in the interests of the people of Ontario. I will never apologize for working with this Prime Minister or any Prime Minister when it comes to advancing the cause of the people of Ontario. And I can tell you something else—

Interjections.

Applause.

The Speaker: Order. I'm afraid that they have taken up your time with all the applause. That's the end of oral questions.

Mr Runciman: On a point of order, Speaker: I think there has been an effort here today, and I appreciate your comments earlier, to delay the proceedings on the part of the government members. This is a continuing strategy. Mr Speaker, do you see what's happening here?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'd like to hear the member for Leeds-Grenville.

Mr Runciman: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate your comments and I would ask of you, if there is interruption in the House, and it is a judgment on your part—obviously it's a judgment call on your part—if it's being caused by the government members, I think the clock should be restored. If it's caused by us, we're penalizing ourselves on this side of the House. But when they deliberately delay the proceedings, it's costing us. We only get one hour a day, and I implore you to make sure that we have every possible opportunity. That's what democracy is all about.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I appreciate your comment, and you would have realized that all parties were extremely guilty today of shouting across and not allowing me to conduct the question period in an orderly manner. It is that kind of interruption that caused that delay and the stretching of time. I hope that tomorrow—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. You can understand, from all this interruption, what really caused the disruptive behaviour in the House. I would appeal to you all that you let us have a better question period tomorrow.

1600

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I appreciate your comments, but I

just want to add to this, because quite frankly we, as New Democrats, have been quite restrained in the House for that very reason—

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: Wow, listen to the Liberals heckle again.

My point is this, Mr Speaker: We had five standing ovations on the part of the government today that in fact took away half a question from the opposition. I add my voice that you don't allow that to happen, because it is not caused by the opposition side.

The Speaker: I thought I had taken care of that by asking for your co-operation tomorrow.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. I'm sure you appreciate that if you do co-operate tomorrow, we will not have this in the future.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to point out that when the Premier sat down, there were two seconds left and we should have had a supplementary. There were two seconds left—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. We're proceeding. Pursuant to standing order 30(b), I'm required to call orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (CHILD AND YOUTH SAFETY), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (SÉCURITÉ DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES)

Mr Takhar moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 73, An Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads / Projet de loi 73, Loi visant à accroître la sécurité des enfants et des jeunes sur les routes de l'Ontario.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Mr Speaker, I will be sharing this time with the member for Chatham-Essex-Kent, the member for Guelph-Wellington and the member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Every year, well over 100 children and youth die on our roads. In the five-year period ending in 2002, over 700 children and youth were killed in road collisions. Over 76,000 children and youth were injured on our roads. That is more than all the seats in SkyDome. These numbers are nothing short of tragic. Although Ontario has the safest roads in Canada, it is clear that more must be done.

I am very proud, on behalf of the government, to be moving forward a package of measures that will, in short, save children's lives. These measures will help prevent our children from being hit by vehicles speeding recklessly and illegally past stopped school buses.

My colleague Pat Hoy, the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, has earned the thanks and the admiration of this House for his years of determination and conviction in bringing this particular measure to life. I thank him again today.

If passed, this bill will enact other measures to further protect children and youth on Ontario's roads: measures that will prevent children from being thrown through car windshields; measures that will reverse the alarming rate of injury and death among novice drivers who travel with other teenagers in the car.

But you don't have to take my word for it. Take the word of parents from communities across the province who spoke out at events and in the media in support of these measures. Take the word of the experts in the field who have come out in strong support of these proposed measures.

Valerie Lee, president of the Infant and Toddler Safety Association, responded to the booster seat and child care seat measures by saying, "We really need to be doing this." Jack Smith of the Canada Safety Council said, "We believe it will make the roads safer for our children." Allyson Hewitt of Safe Kids Canada has also welcomed these measures. So have the CAA and the OPP. The Ontario Medical Association also tells me that mandatory booster seats will save lives.

Members will have seen the media coverage today about a new report from Safe Kids Canada that makes a compelling case for booster seats. I welcome this report. As TORONTO 1 reported yesterday, "Having a child in the back, strapped in a lap belt alone is not enough. In fact, a booster seat is crucial for their safety."

I'm sure that you, like me, were also moved by the tragic story on CityTV that told of the truly horrific injuries children suffer when they are not buckled up in booster seats. Today's Toronto Star also gives a graphic description of how seatbelts can ride up and cut into a child's internal organs when they are not using a booster seat. Our measures will prevent children in the future from sustaining these sorts of shocking injuries.

There is an unprecedented demand for us to move forward with these measures. There have been extensive calls in regional and national media for us to take this action. The Daily Observer in Pembroke said, "The provincial government is to be commended for a tough new package of road safety measures.... If they help prevent at least one needless death, they will be well worth it."

Currently, grandparents and babysitters are not required to buckle up kids. The St Catharines Standard described this fact as "a major safety loophole." They commented that "it is a loophole the Ontario government wisely plans to seal."

When it comes to school bus measures, the support from the experts is just as strong and just as vocal. Gary

Couture, Kawartha Lakes OPP detachment commander, says that up to now, prosecuting offenders has been difficult. The biggest problem is getting a description of the driver. He said, "The legislation now provides a wider range of options."

The Sarnia Observer asked, "How many sons and daughters must needlessly be killed" before we move ahead with vehicle owner liability? They went on to point out, "The problem with the current law is most bus drivers are only able to catch a glimpse of the back of the driver's head as vehicles speed by ... but the licence plate rarely goes unnoticed."

Even the Toronto Sun ran an article headlined, "Law Makes Ride To School Safer."

Talking about the teenage driver measures, Police Staff Sergeant Tom Carrique said, "This is a positive step." Peterborough county OPP Constable Bob LaFreniere is reported as saying that the teenage driver measures are "a way of lessening fatalities."

There is more. My office has received a number of letters from people across the province supporting this proposed legislation. I have heard from people who say they are glad this important issue is finally being addressed. I have heard from others who say that increasing the responsibility of people who are transporting children is a great initiative. Some have suggested that every school in Ontario should have a car seat safety day.

I could go on, but I believe it is clear to this House that these measures have widespread support, and so they should. After all, Transport Canada tells us that booster seats and child car seats, when used properly, can reduce the chance of injury or death by 75%.

1610

The only place this bill has met some criticism is in this House. I was especially shocked that the member from Oak Ridges chose to criticize this bill, even though the experts applaud it, even though parents welcome it, even though this bill, if passed, will save young lives. I say, shame. Frankly, if the member's opposition had been based on research or facts, it would be cause for serious and legitimate debate, but most of his arguments defy logic.

The member from Oak Ridges says that the cost of a booster seat is too much, that many families would not be able to pay $100 for a booster seat. I don't know where the member of the opposition shops, but a booster seat starts at $30, and there are several models in the $40 to $60 price range. Thirty dollars seems to me a small price to pay to save a child's life. It is difficult to argue otherwise. If this legislation passes, we are proposing a one-year phase-in period to give parents time to prepare.

Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death and injury among children and youth. Right now, the law requires children over 40 pounds to use a seatbelt.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Takhar: My colleague on the NDP side doesn't get much time, so I think he wants to speak now.

Seatbelts don't sit properly on the body of a child that size. As a result, in a crash the child either slides under the seatbelt or the seatbelt rides up to the abdomen, increasing the potential for serious internal injuries. The solution is a booster seat. A booster seat offers much better protection for children who are too big for child car seats and too small for seatbelts. That is why we are proposing making booster seats mandatory for children between 40 and 80 pounds, with a standing height of less than four feet, nine inches, or a maximum age of eight.

And what about the babysitters or grandparents who are transporting five kids in the back seat? It is just as important to protect five children as it is to protect one. We cannot ignore the safety of these children just because they are not with their parents. That is why we are proposing that more drivers be required to use car seats when transporting children. I realize that it may not always be convenient, but isn't our children's safety worth a little extra effort?

Valerie Lee, the president of the Infant and Toddler Safety Association said it best. She said that it seemed that people were, "Focusing on convenience for adults, rather than the safety of children. Certainly, emergencies happen. In a true emergency, a police officer is not likely to ticket the driver. The rest of the time, it just requires planning."

Of course, the same arguments were put forward when seatbelts were made mandatory for adults. The fact is, mandatory adult seatbelts have saved thousands of lives in Ontario. The measures we are proposing in this legislation will do the same for children. For those in genuine economic hardship, there are programs around the province that subsidize the cost of child car seats.

I also want to address the concern that going after the owner of a vehicle is in some way unfair. Tell that to the parents whose children have been struck and killed by drivers who illegally pass stopped school buses. Should we tell these parents that the drivers cannot be charged because no one got a good description? We are talking about accountability and we are talking about responsibility. I am sure that all members will see the fairness in that.

Equally, police must use discretion in laying charges if, for example, the crime is committed by someone who has stolen your car. I, for one, trust our police to use discretionary power judiciously.

Finally, I want to touch on the issue of teenage drivers. The sad fact is that 16- to 19-year-old drivers are involved in almost 8% of fatal collisions, yet they only represent about 5% of Ontario's driving population. This is simply unacceptable. The statistics speak volumes. Novice teenage drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a fatal or serious collision when there are other teenagers in the car.

We need to protect our teenagers. That is why we would limit the number of young passengers that a teenage G2 driver could carry to one passenger for the first six months of G2 during certain hours of the day. That limit goes up to three passengers after six months. Of course, when they pass their full driving test, those restrictions are lifted. The restrictions do not apply to G2

drivers 20 years of age or older, and they would not apply if the G2 driver has an experienced driver in the front seat. In addition, family members would be exempted from this restriction, regardless of age. This is a very moderate measure that balances the need to allow teenagers the freedom to drive while protecting them from peer pressure. This is what responsible government is all about, and this is good public policy.

To conclude, this bill, if passed, will save precious lives. I am therefore asking and seeking the support of all members of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 73, an Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads. To say that I'm pleased is actually an understatement.

First of all, let me say that I want to thank the Premier for his support of a particular part of this bill, and we're talking about school bus safety. I also want to thank the Minister of Transportation for including the school bus portion of this in this bill.

There would be members here who know that I introduced a bill that had a component of the school bus safety aspect that we're talking about here today. Last night, I was thinking it was at least small history in my mind that I introduced this bill for the first time, that portion on school bus safety, in June 1996. We are in the first days of June now. I did note that in going back over some of the aspects of the bill.

I introduced it six times to this Legislature between 1996 and 2003, and on three occasions it received the unanimous consent of the House and was referred to a committee on three occasions. However, the government of the day did not see fit to bring this important aspect of school bus safety to a committee. Thus, I introduced it those six times.

I want to thank the supporters of my school bus safety bill. They have been with me for eight years, attempting to have the bill progress through this House and, if passed, Bill 73 will see that come into being.

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I want to thank the families of children who assisted me and stayed with me over these eight years, those who travelled to Queen's Park to tell their story about their children and their lives and the impact of the lack of safety in their lives. I want to thank the many organizations that supported this aspect of the bill. There are too many to mention, but certainly school boards, parents, teachers, municipalities, police, farm organizations—the list goes on and on.

To this day I receive letters from persons who have witnessed a vehicle passing a school bus when the red lights are flashing. I continue to receive mail from people who are horrified, white-knuckled, as they watch a vehicle pass a school bus illegally. It happens far too often. It is a serious breach of our driving laws.

As the minister mentioned, bus drivers have stated in a survey with Transport Canada that about one third of Canadian school bus drivers see at least one illegal pass each day. Anecdotally, bus drivers have told me it has happened three and four times a shift. Many of these buses go out on to our highways and rural roads more than once. They may embark on one route, bring the children to the school and then go out and do another route. This happens all over Ontario in our urban centres, our small urban centres and our rural communities. There are 810,000 children who ride school buses each and every day, many of them quite young. They ride on 16,000 school buses in Ontario and, as I stated, some of those buses make more than one trip in the morning and more than one trip in the afternoon.

Why do we need this legislation? Because the current legislation states that if one illegally passes a school bus when the red lights are flashing, the bus driver must identify the offending driver. They must identify their face. First of all, the bus drivers are watching the children. Their primary objective is to watch the children get on the bus or disembark. If a car passes a bus from the back to the front, the bus driver only sees the back of one's head. If the vehicle is going at a high rate of speed, it is very difficult to identify one's face. Some cars have tinted windows, making it virtually impossible to see one's face. Daylight hours might also restrict the visibility of one's face in a car. It could be raining. It could be snowing. Some of the bus routes are long enough and late enough that daylight hours are diminished.

What we need is a conviction mechanism. We've needed this for a good many years now. Bus drivers, however, and other experts in the field of school bus safety believe they can identify a licence plate. So this bill, if passed, would allow for the identification of a licence plate. It is known as vehicle liability.

I've had many conversations over this eight years. I've done countless interviews with persons on radio, television, by mail, telephone—all manner of communication. Vehicle liability, I have explained to them, has been used by the previous government for red light cameras. If a car goes through a red light that has one of these cameras, the owner of the vehicle will get the ticket. Vehicle liability is also used for vehicle impoundment. This is when someone is driving while suspended for drunk driving. We also use vehicle liability for parking tickets and other parking offences. It's not always known who is driving the car that day, but a ticket is given. We need to ensure that we have a conviction mechanism. If Bill 73 is passed, the experts—and the bus drivers are the most expert at this—agree that they may be able to get a licence plate.

It's interesting, and I've mentioned this in the Legislature in the past, that one jurisdiction tracks these offenders. Bus drivers have seen the licence plate; they've reported it to the police. However, the police can do very little about it under the existing law. But they have sent notices to the owner of the vehicle and stated, "On a certain day at a certain time, your vehicle was seen passing a school bus when the red lights were flashing." They were getting between 40 and 60 a month at this particular police force.

In talking with police officers, I found further that often it was the same licence plates coming up over and over again—flagrant disregard for the safety of our children. And, as I mentioned, many of them are very young. They depend on those flashing red lights for their lives.

In the main, people seem to stop for red lights, stop signs, railway crossings. But for some unknown reason, to me at least, they believe they can pass a school bus with reckless abandon. I've even had reports given to me that they pass on the door side of the bus down on the shoulder of the road—extremely dangerous. We've had many injuries and many deaths when people pass a school bus with flagrant disregard.

We are proposing to amend the Highway Traffic Act to make vehicle owners accountable when vehicles illegally pass stopped school buses with overhead red lights flashing. Currently, the offence is only imposed on a driver. If you believe that someone who is driving your vehicle might pass a school bus when the red lights are flashing, it would be wise not to let them drive that vehicle. If you believe that someone is driving your vehicle and might break any of our highway traffic laws, maybe you should think twice about letting them use that vehicle.

We are proposing in this bill, if passed, to amend the Highway Traffic Act so that all school buses would display warning signs to remind drivers that they risk a maximum fine of $2,000 for illegally passing a stopped school bus with overhead red lights flashing. That is the maximum that could be imposed.

I want to give credit to the members opposite, and members of the past government, for having raised the fine levels. However, they didn't go far enough, because without a conviction mechanism you could have raised the fine to any amount, you could have made it $10,000; the problem was, we could not get convictions. It was nearly impossible to identify one's face. I've had reports and I have received film sent to me by parents who watched persons pass a bus when the red lights were flashing. They sat behind shrubbery and bushes in their yards and filmed, not one, not two, not three, but four cars in succession passing a school bus when the red lights were flashing. It happens all too frequently. It is extremely dangerous.

During a two-month campaign to educate drivers on school bus safety in Chatham-Kent some time ago, I might add, the police reported 107 violations where motorists drove past school buses while their red lights were flashing. That's 107 times in a two-month period, when the police were on this blitz, that they witnessed people passing school buses with the red lights flashing.

One might say, "Why don't the police do this on a more frequent basis?" As I mentioned, there are 16,000 school buses, some of them running more than one route per day, certainly one in the morning and one in mid-afternoon. It is impossible for the police to follow 16,000 school buses each and every day. Thus we need a change in our law. We need to ensure that people understand that passing a school bus with the red lights flashing will not be tolerated here in Ontario.

1630

There are other jurisdictions that use this method of vehicle liability: Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Yukon. When I introduced my particular bill in 1996, I had calls from as far away as Florida, other states in the union, and perhaps from some of these very provinces, inquiring about my bill.

In the United States, 15 of the 26 states surveyed indicated their motor vehicle laws contain provisions to hold vehicle owners liable. One must be certain about who is driving one's vehicle. We are stating to the public of Ontario that passing school buses will not be tolerated.

The public grew to know what the law was, what the law actually stated through 1996 and the subsequent eight years because of the publicity garnered from previous bills. I had bus drivers telling me that people were passing the school buses with their hands up to their faces, shielding their faces so that they could pass without being detected. This can't be tolerated. People knew what the law was from police, school boards, parents, teachers and the Legislature talking about this—and they were shielding their faces as they passed school buses.

I've heard all manner of excuses for why one should pass a school bus when the red lights are flashing, and there is no valid reason for doing so. Persons have told me, "Well, I know all the children who get off at this particular house. I know all the children who get off. I see that bus every day. I know, when those five get off, that's all that get off that bus."

But I know of someone who was injured when visiting a friend. In that instance, perhaps it was the sixth child getting off. I don't know the exact number, but the point is you do not always know who is getting off that bus.

All manner of excuses: The prime one I get is, "I didn't see the bus." It's yellow. It's big. It's as big as a transport. It has lights all around it, some on top of it. There are strobe lights on some of our buses. They didn't see the bus, they told me. However, they did go around it. These people happened to pass a bus from the back; thus they must have gone around it. There is no excuse for passing a school bus when the red lights are flashing.

I'm so very pleased that this aspect of the bill is contained in Bill 73. The other aspects of the bill are excellent: to provide booster seats and there are some changes to our teenage driving laws here in Ontario, all in the name of enhancing the safety of children and youth on our school buses.

In wrapping up, I simply want to thank all those people who supported me over these eight years. I also want to once again thank the Premier and the Minister of Transportation.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I am very pleased to rise in support of Bill 73, a bill that helps save children's lives. I would like to thank the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex for all the work that he has done on

this issue, and the Minister of Transportation for introducing the legislation that is so long overdue.

School buses are a topic that, as a former trustee, have been near and dear to my heart. Some 800,000 of our children ride on school buses every day. That's almost half of the student population of Ontario. If you go to rural school boards, almost every child rides on the school bus every day.

In fact, school buses have an excellent safety record. If you look at the transportation that occurs while the student is on the bus, your child is much safer riding on a school bus than in the family car. There is no safer place for your child to be, going up and down the highway, than on the school bus. But where there is a problem is getting on and off the school bus. Virtually all school-bus-related accidents have to do with children getting on or off the bus. We are proposing to fix that with this legislation.

The current legislation says it's illegal to pass a school bus while the red lights are flashing. The purpose of that is clear: to stop the traffic in both directions so that children who are getting on or off the bus, as the case may be, can cross safely to the other side of the road. This is a system that only allows our children to approach the school bus and go home at night safely if they can safely cross the road. That's what the issue is here.

But we hear time after time—in fact, data show this—that a third of school bus drivers have an illegal pass at least once a day. If you talk to school bus drivers, every school bus driver can rhyme off incidents of cars that illegally, repeatedly pass buses. Of course, the danger is that while children are trying to cross, somebody who is illegally passing is going to run down a child. On average, one child per year is killed because of somebody who was illegally passing a school bus. We want to stop that.

When I talked to our drivers in my home board of Upper Grand in the Guelph area, they described the situation. They've got maybe 72 kids on the bus, and they have to make sure the kids on the bus are safe and that the kids who are getting on and off the bus are safe. If somebody illegally passes the bus, how on earth are they supposed to identify the driver? The only way you can get a conviction under the current law is to identify the driver of the car. That just doesn't happen. If fact, bus drivers tell me that even when they have partial identifying information, or they think they have information, and report it to the local police, the police are wonderfully co-operative about investigating. But even when charged, when it actually gets to court, the onus to identify the driver is so great that the charges actually fail. It's virtually impossible to get a conviction. The bus drivers regard it as an exercise in frustration.

That is why we are proposing, under this bill, to change the law so that instead of having to identify the driver, the bus driver will merely have to identify the vehicle; that is, to get the plate number. With the plate number, they will be able to report that incident to the police, and the police can investigate and will be able to lay charges. We hope that as drivers realize they can no longer run and hide, they will stop breaking the law. In order to remind them of the law, if the act passes, we will be putting warning signs on buses to remind drivers that it's illegal to pass and that the fine for an illegal pass is $2,000.

This legislation that my colleague for Chatham-Kent-Essex has introduced on innumerable occasions—it seems to him, I'm sure—as a private member's bill has been supported in the past by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. When I was president of that organization we supported it. The Ontario School Bus Association, which represents school bus operators, is enthusiastically supporting the legislation. This is something we need to do, and we need to do it now.

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Unfortunately, the Tories seem to have voted against it, or at least blocked it, on some occasions. The member for Oak Ridges, the former Minister of Transportation, Mr Klees, told the House just a few weeks ago, when we introduced the legislation, that he thought this was just another tax grab. Well, it's not another tax grab. It's about protecting children's lives.

The second issue arises with children getting on and off the bus. When you are talking about very little people, the driver in fact has a blind spot as a child gets off the bus and comes around the front of the bus. The driver has a blind spot and can't actually see the little kiddies if they're close to the bus. In the last 10 years, six children have been killed and many injured by their own school bus because the driver couldn't see the little kid walking around the front of the bus.

If any of you have looked at school buses, you may have noticed that there's this peculiar wire thing on the front. This is a safety arm that, when the bus stops and the kids are getting on and off, opens out. It forces kids to walk out and around the bus and get far enough in front so that the driver will absolutely, positively always see the little kids coming around. Bus operators support adding this. The school boards support adding the arm. In fact, about 50% of the school buses in the province already have these safety arms. We will be making it mandatory, if this legislation passes, for every new school bus to have the safety arm. This will cut down on the death and injury of our children and this is a very important step, supported, as I said, by the boards and operators.

These are two very important measures that have to do with school bus transportation. But those aren't the only issues we're covering here.

We're also dealing with the issue of teenaged drivers. All the data tell us that for 16- to 19-year-old drivers, the risk of serious motor vehicle accidents leading to death or serious injury goes up threefold if there are three or more passengers in the car. We know teenagers. You get a car full of teenagers and you get this peer pressure thing happening. They drive too fast, they don't pay attention and accidents happen.

I know there was an accident in my community, at my kid's high school. Not too many years ago a carload of

teenagers—it had nothing to do with alcohol; all of them had 0% blood-alcohol, but it was a group of teenagers in a car, an inexperienced driver, a little bit too much speed, by the sounds of things, and we had fatalities. We don't want that happening, and it's been documented over and over that that is what happens with young drivers. Interestingly, with older drivers the rate of accidents seems to go down slightly when they have passengers. But with teenagers, the more passengers, the more it goes up.

What we are proposing in this legislation is that for the first six months a teenager with a G2 licence will only be able to carry one other passenger aged 19 and under. After that, a teenager will be able to carry up to three passengers aged 19 and under. Once they've passed their full G licence, the limit will stop.

If the teenager is transporting other family members—perhaps they're taking younger brothers and sisters to the ball game or they're going to school as a family—this restriction will not apply. But in terms of having a car full of your buddies, I know it's tough on the kids, but they're not going to be able to do that any more. That's in this legislation.

In fact, Constable Bob LaFreniere from the Peterborough county OPP said, "I really and truly believe it will lessen the risk of disturbances in the car," adding that most collisions are caused by driver distraction. Can you think of anything more distracting than a group of teenagers in a car? "I see it as a way of lessening fatalities," he said.

The final thing we are doing is introducing a requirement for increased use of booster seats. There's some fascinating data. Most parents believe that as their children get to be about maybe four or five they can get rid of the booster seat and just simply strap the kids into the car seat belts. We need to think about the way that seat belts are designed. Seat belts are designed to go around your hips and they're designed to go across your bones in your chest and shoulders. If you put a little kid in a seat belt, what happens is that because they are so small, the seat belt rises up over the abdomen—no bones protecting them—and the shoulder belt rides up over the neck, so that the child becomes more prone to injury. In fact, the doctors who deal with this actually have a name for this. They call it "seat belt syndrome." Seat belt syndrome describes the pattern of injuries to the internal organs and spine caused by a seat belt that doesn't fit correctly. The damage is often so severe that doctors can see the mark of the lap belt on a child's abdomen.

In fact, what we are led to believe is that many deaths and serious injuries occur to children who are riding in cars with improperly fitting seat belts. What this legislation will require is that kids up to the age of eight, who are small, will be required to be in a booster seat. What that does is makes the little kid taller so the seat belt fits properly. While this is a bit of a nuisance, admittedly, for parents, you can get a booster seat for around $40. I must say that as a mom it does have an upside because when you make the little kids taller they can actually see out the windows, and when they can see out the windows they cause less distraction.

There are four very important measures in here, and I am very pleased to be able to speak in support of all of them.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I am pleased to speak to this bill as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, as an MPP and as a parent. I certainly have received calls of concern about this bill, and I will say up front that I could not support the bill more.

I want to look first of all at the booster seats and the dynamics of an accident. I've had parents say, "I can put my children in seat belts." If you are driving a car at 120 kilometres an hour and you hit an immobile object such as a tree, your occupants and your children continue to move at 120 kilometres an hour. If you are in a head-on where you are doing 60 or 70 kilometres, the impact is of 140 kilometres an hour hitting an immobile object.

With the seat belts, the straps are perhaps two inches wide—I still think in the old terms—so the full force of stopping your child will be spread across this little two-inch-wide area across their abdomen as opposed to a booster seat where there is a very large area that will contain it and spread it over 20 times, 30 times greater an area, having less of an impact on it.

For far too many children in seat belts who are between 18 and 36 kilograms, the belt will end up across their neck, and again, when the vehicle stops, they don't. Sometimes the belts will kill. Sometimes they will go through the windows, and that will kill. There shouldn't be one child in Ontario die because of being unrestrained.

I've had concerns expressed to me from grandparents and neighbours and friends that say, "I want to move the children and this is now a difficulty for me to have the seat in it." We're talking life and death, folks. We're not talking inconvenience; we're talking life and death.

I've had people say to me, "We drive carefully." I don't doubt that, but that's why we invented the word "accident," because there are things that are beyond our control.

With seat belts—and we still have young children at home—one of the games is sometimes to reach over and undo them while travelling. If you're at a great rate of speed, do you stop and do the belt up or do you continue driving for a while, as opposed to booster seats, which are more difficult to undo?

1650

I have had people contact me saying, "We have three young children, and three booster seats won't fit in the back of our vehicle." I can appreciate that that's a problem. But again, we are talking our children's lives.

It has been suggested to me by many that the booster seats are too expensive. We bought ours for about $30 or $40. They may be as much as $150 for your child. Folks, everything is relative. We buried our son in January, and I would trade everything we own for one more hug. Is your child not worth $40? Yes. That's a pretty cheap price to pay to have your child live.

The arguments put forward, I would suggest, are inconveniences. It may even require a sacrifice, but for every parent in Ontario, we know that part of raising children is making a sacrifice to ensure they are successful and to ensure their health. The $40 may require a financial sacrifice, but I will confess to having no sympathy for that argument. Your child's very life depends on that booster seat in far too many cases. I applaud this bill because there cannot be a price put on our children, whether it be to prevent them from death or whether to prevent an injury.

We also have mandatory safety crossing arms as part of this bill. In 1999, there was an absolute tragedy in my community. I was chairperson of the school board at that time when a young man had permission to ride a bus other than his to go to another student's birthday party. He got off the bus, the driver closed the door and the young person realized that he had to go to the other side. Being eight years old, he acted like an eight-year-old and bolted across in front of the bus and was killed instantly. It's a loss that his family will never get over and a loss that the bus driver will never get over. To the best of my knowledge, the bus driver never drove again, but it wasn't his fault. It was no one's fault. Because of the high nose on the front of buses, this young man lost his life, for sake of the cost of an arm. We need to realize that children are children and will behave like children. We have the responsibility as adults to protect them, and that didn't happen in that case.

Many of the bus operators in Ontario are voluntarily adding the arms, but I want to pay a special tribute to the Jelley family in Trenton, who have, since the loss of their beloved Brandon, paid for crossing arms on a number of other buses to ensure that no other parent experiences what they have experienced. That is tremendous strength in the face of a brutal loss and I applaud them for their efforts to protect other children. That's how much it means to them and that's how much it should mean to everyone else in Ontario to save children's lives.

Warning signs: I'd like to talk about the vehicle owners being accountable. I applaud the member for Chatham-Kent Essex for persevering with this. He referred, when he was talking a few minutes ago, to flagrant drivers who pass buses knowing that they're doing it. We live on what used to be a highway. I have seen the bus stop and I have seen cars down the road blowing the horn for our kids to get off the road and out of their way. Because they were in such a rush, they were prepared to put my children's and your children's lives at risk to pass it. Facing it and coming behind it, they believe that if they blow the horn, then it's off their conscience, and it's not.

I have personally seen vehicles that I would say I am 99.9% certain of who was driving them, but not 100%, when I've spoken to the police. Again, as Mr Hoy referred to, there were no charges because a judge would have to determine absolutely, beyond all reasonable doubt, that that person was driving. That couldn't be the case, and the police couldn't pursue it. So I applaud this.

Now, I've had callers say, "Do you trust bus drivers to do this? Do you trust them to detect these cars going past them?" Folks, we trust them to take 72 of our children, put them in a steel box, run them down the highway at 100 kilometres per hour, looking after the bus, looking after discipline, looking after the hurts and, in fact, even providing counselling in social worker roles at times. Yes, I trust our bus drivers because they've come to me for years with grave concerns about the young people on their buses putting their lives at risk when they go across.

Sometimes it frustrates drivers. You'll see a bus stopped and the lights stay on. They wait and wait, because the driver is not letting the children out until he or she is absolutely certain the cars have stopped both ways—very inefficient but very safe. I applaud them for that because they've said children's lives are ahead of letting someone hurry to get home to watch a TV show.

Certainly some arguments have been made about holding the owner of the vehicle accountable. Why not leave it with the driver? How can the owner be accountable? If someone drinks and drives, we hold the owner accountable, because we say if that person is drinking and driving, they could kill someone. I would suggest that before you loan your car to someone, if it's not you driving when you pass, you better remember that that person could kill someone or two, three or four kids crossing a highway. If it's important to do for drunk driving, and I believe it is—I know it is—it's equally important to do it to protect our children.

We need to be ashamed at times of some of the actions of motorists on our roads. We live in a society and all of you have experienced where you're driving along the road and someone will tear past you where there's a solid line and it's illegal to pass, you get into town at a traffic light and they are there beside you. They've risked your life and their lives and the lives of those in oncoming cars to get there ahead of time. It's time we stopped allowing them to risk our children's lives so they can get to where they're going three seconds sooner than if they had obeyed the law.

Mandatory warning signs on buses: How many signs do you want on buses? A sign on the bus warning that if you pass there will be a fine of $2,000? There are still signs on the 401, which I drive regularly, that were put up by the NDP government and say that for 100 kilometres an hour the fine is zero, for 120 the fine is that, and for 140 the fine is that. That still has an impact on me. I believe it still has an impact on motorists. People think about the money it will cost them. So yes, I support that also. I think it is a sign that says to people, "This province is taking seriously what you do around our children and their buses. If you choose to flagrantly violate it, it's going to cost you big dollars." It's still cheap compared to a child's life.

I hope we never collect a fine. I hope there's never a penny that comes in of the $2,000, because I hope people will look at that and say, "My gosh, I have a responsibility as a citizen of Ontario not to pass that bus, and I will stop now."

Teenage driving: I have recollections long ago of being a teenager. In fact, I would suggest to you there's an 18-year-old trapped inside this 57-year-old body. With my weight problems, there are probably two 18-year-olds trapped inside this body.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): That left me a long time ago.

Mr Parsons: OK. But I remember getting the licence and wanting to show it off. I was an absolutely superb driver when I was out the lane and down the highway, but when I was out of sight, I was an appalling driver if I hit—

Mr Bisson: Try being a new pilot.

Mr Parsons: Accident history tells us that if they have three or more young people their age in the car, the chances of their having an accident compared to zero passengers goes up about five times, because people are people and they want to show off this new power. It's a sign of attaining adulthood. It's showing how fast they can drive the car and how much they can impress.

Then I talk to police officers, ambulance attendants and parents who have had to identify their 16-year-old daughter or 17-year-old son at the hospital. We say that we have a responsibility as adults to override these youthful desires to speed and show off, and to put in place a mechanism to ensure their safety. They may not like it. I am sure each of us growing up was told, "It's for your own good." This is for their own good. The statistics tell us all too clearly that we lose too many young people for absolutely nothing other than a moment or two of trying to show how cool they are, how mature they are and how fast they can drive.

1700

Interjection.

Mr Parsons: I don't need to know because I was probably with you.

Yes, this legislation presents a need for parents and the public to change what they're doing, but it presents a wonderful initiative on the part of this government and this ministry to protect the children of our province, the young people of our province and even, in the case of teen-aged drivers, others on the highway who could potentially be involved in an accident with a carload of teenagers.

It is a good bill that will make Ontario a better and safer place in which to live. I am very proud of this bill. I applaud the Minister of Transportation and I applaud the staff for bringing forward a bill that will very quickly and simply enhance safety in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's pleasure to rise with the Liberal leadoff and make a few comments on Bill 73, An Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads. I am going to ask a question here and maybe Mr Hoy can answer it, or someone from the Liberal caucus, in the response. It's about the identification of the vehicle.

Let's take an example in which someone passes a bus with the lights flashing. From your understanding, as a clarification for me because I don't understand this, I want to know who can identify that licence plate. First of all, is it simply the bus driver? This is a scenario where there is no photo radar and no police officers are around. Will it be, for example, just the bus driver? Could it also be perhaps one of the passengers on the school bus, for example, a grade 7 or grade 8 student? Could it be someone in a field nearby, such as a parent waiting for the child at the gate or someone on a tractor doing some cultivating or taking off hay or grain? Could it actually be someone in another vehicle?

I'd really like to get clarification on that because I think it's important that we know just who can identify the person and who will be able to have that person charged, because now we are talking about a $2,000 fine for the owner of a car that someone else is driving.

Mr Bisson: I really enjoyed your 15 or 20 minutes. I thought the member for Prince Edward-Hastings did a really good job of pulling together all the points, doing it in a way that was very passionate and certainly got my attention and, I would imagine, that of other members of the assembly. I want to congratulate you on what I thought was quite a good 20-minute presentation on this bill.

I want to say at the outset—I will be speaking a little bit later—that we will support this bill. We think most of what is in it is pretty good stuff.

There are just a couple of things that come to mind. One of them is the point my good friend Mr Dunlop has raised, which is the issue of charging the owner of the car for having gone by a school bus. I take it there has been a change in the Liberal position because I remember the Liberal caucus being opposed to that with regard to photo radar when we were in government. The ideological position of the Liberals of the day was not to charge owners of vehicles that may be charged by way of photo radar because, the scenario was, you might lend your car to somebody. The person who drives the car gets caught by photo radar and the owner gets caught. So I just say to the Liberals, it's about time that you come to your senses on that point. I never really understood why it is, as a caucus, you opposed that, if there was a way to do it.

Keep in mind, the only reason people—I shouldn't say the only reason, but one of the big influences in being able to make sure that people follow the law is the fear of getting caught. If the fear of getting caught, in the case of the school buses, is that a police officer has to see you in order to charge you for passing a school bus when the school bus is stopped and the lights are flashing, there is not much likelihood of that happening, because the driver, by and large, will see the police car if it's an unmarked one, and the police can't be everywhere.

So it's the fear of getting caught. I think that adds to the ability of being able to prevent this. Now, if the driver of the school bus or others can say, "That particular car on this particular driver's licence has infracted the law," and then the person is charged, there's less likelihood of them doing it.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I'm really pleased to rise to support this bill. I think that legislation like this that is based on research really deserves to be supported by everyone in the House. These are safety issues.

I want to speak specifically to the issue of the novice drivers. Having grown up in a small town, I want to draw on two personal experiences: one as a youngster and one as a mother.

My experience as a teenager is one that my children are never going to have to experience; that is, having known young people who died in car accidents on side roads outside of town. The majority of the time, there were more than two or three kids in the car with the driver. My colleague from Guelph spoke about the peer pressure when kids get in a car together. They feed on one another, and the distractions are obvious. We all remember that, and the member from Prince Edward-Hastings talked about that.

My experience as a mother has been somewhat different, in that I've lived in the city with my children. I don't have any teenagers any more—they're all out of those years—but those years between 13 and 20, especially between 16 and 19, you wonder at night where they're going to be. But living in the city, I knew that they were on transit or in a cab. They didn't have to drive in the city.

So this bill, with the provisions for school buses, the provisions for young drivers, has a lot to do with safety for rural children. I think those of us who live in urban settings need to think about how important these things are for kids outside of the city. They are more at risk of accidents from school buses and from being in cars on side roads. So I support this 100%.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I clearly support the bill that's in front of us today. I think the speakers who spoke today brought forward some excellent points. I don't want to really repeat all of what they had to say. Just in general terms, the whole issue of driving and the way people drive their vehicles, I've noticed as a driver in the past few years, has changed dramatically. People are driving a lot faster. There have been, at least in the Toronto area and my own riding of Scarborough Southwest, quite a few more serious and fatal accidents taking place. Pedestrians are getting killed or seriously wounded by these accidents.

Anything that can be done to reduce injury or death is welcome. The correct use of child car seats here would do exactly that: reduce deaths. Transport Canada has said it would do it by 75%, which is a substantial number.

I think that this is the first step in looking, at some point in time, at even the broader issue of trying to deal with drivers and driving habits in general, because I've seen a great deterioration, at least in Toronto and the Scarborough area. We need to bring forward laws that, as mentioned earlier, can make people afraid or at least concerned that if they break them, they will be punished. I think this law is at least bringing awareness and starting in the right process, of having people try to drive safely and to try to protect their children or passengers as well.

1710

The Acting Speaker: One of the government members has two minutes to reply.

Mr Parsons: On behalf of the Minister of Transportation, the members for Chatham-Kent Essex, Guelph-Wellington and myself, we would like to thank the people who responded: members for Simcoe North, Timmins-James Bay, Don Valley West and Scarborough Southwest. The names are almost lyrical as you run through them.

The question was asked by the member from Simcoe North as to who will be able to report it. The answer I'm going to give you is very vague. It may be better developed, but I don't have the exact details, which is, it will allow bus drivers and concerned citizens to report.

Obviously that has to be dealt with. I'm sure what you were suggesting is that there has to be some credibility of the witness. The exact process will appear in the drafting of the regulations. I would suggest there will need to be additional consultation with the local police forces and the crown attorneys to ascertain what exactly it is.

We can't have a police car follow every bus, and the risk is too great to not do something, so there will be consultation and it will be drafted. It is a very, very serious point to prevent malicious allegations, neighbours just upset, or somebody making an honest mistake reporting the vehicle. We require protection for the owner of that vehicle.

However, I would like to express thanks and pleasure for the comments that are made. There is no greater treasure we have than our children. There is no way to put money on to it.

For neighbours and friends who want to be good neighbours and perhaps transport children to a club activity or to the school, I know that they also want to do the right thing. I know that we will find a way to ensure that the seats are there and available. I truly believe that the bill itself will strengthen the safety on our highways.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Dunlop: Mr Speaker, may I have the unanimous consent of the House to stand down our leadoff hour?

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

I am prepared to recognize the member for Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: I want to thank the members of the House for standing down the lead. Mr Klees, our critic for transportation, wanted to speak for an hour on this particular bill and—

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I'd rather hear you for an hour.

Mr Dunlop: No, you don't want to hear me for an hour. It's always a pleasure to speak to a piece of legislation and it's always a pleasure to listen to Minister Caplan heckle me. So it's a typical day.

Hon Mr Caplan: It's a good-natured heckle.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, it's a good-natured heckle.

I'm pleased to speak to Bill 73, An Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads. The first

thing I wanted to really say is, there are a lot of really positive things in this piece of legislation, and I'm the first to acknowledge that. But there are a lot of things that have been done to draft this legislation that I'm not happy with at all and I want to put on the record.

I think the safety of our children and our grandchildren, our nieces and nephews, is paramount. There's no question at all that that's a priority. Years ago, in 1970, I lost a sister in a school bus accident. I brought that up here in the House before. The lights were flashing. She was just seven years old at the time. I can tell you, that had a major impact on my parents until the day they both passed away.

School bus safety has got to be a high priority. I think someone mentioned a little earlier that each day in the province of Ontario a little over 800,000 students climb on the buses. They're taken to their schools and they're brought back home. I think we should acknowledge the great job that our School Bus Operators' Association of Ontario do in this province. There are very few lives lost. Of course, any life lost is one too many.

I want to talk a little bit about safety and our government's record from 1995 through to the fall of 2003. I want to put on the record that back in 1995 the province of Ontario ranked sixth in North America for road safety. We had some excellent Ministers of Transportation in the eight years we were in power who made a lot of very positive moves, so in 2002 we moved to number one in North America. I'm thinking of people like Norm Sterling, Frank Klees, David Turnbull and Tony Clement. There were a number of ministers—

Mr Bisson: Al Palladini.

Mr Dunlop: Of course, who could ever forget Al Palladini?

They made a number of improvements in Ontario so that today I don't believe we've dropped from number one in this time frame. As a result, we should be very proud and build on our strengths.

I think one of the areas we're very strong in is that of drinking and driving. I was so proud to be part of the ignition interlock device bill that requires an ignition interlock to be installed in vehicles as a result of a first-time offence. I believe it's still the toughest regulation, the toughest piece of legislation, dealing with impaired drivers in North America. I know that other provinces and other states are seriously looking at what we do with our drinking and driving as well.

I'm very concerned about a number of factors in the area of seat belts in particular. I believe the legislation calls for the addition—people between 40 and 80 pounds and anyone less than four foot nine or less than eight years old will now have a booster seat—or having a birth certificate; they must have a birth certificate available.

To begin with, there are a couple of points I want to make on that. When we're dealing with cars and vans, the fact of the matter is that there will be a number of areas where we will have to police this. That means we will require more police officers to check vans and cars with young children in them. There are a number of things the police officers will require. One, of course, will be a set of weigh scales. People may laugh at this, or they may think I'm making a mockery of the bill or something, but we do have to make a point. Who will police all these cars across our province? As you say, we are two million, so I'm guessing there are probably 500,000 or 600,000 children who would fit into this category. Somehow we have to police that, so police officers will be required to have scales to weigh children less than 80 pounds.

They'll also have to have some way of measuring their height. That will require some kind of measuring tape or maybe something like this, which came from Safe Kids Canada. Maybe everyone received this. They have a kind of scale here. If I could just show this, Mr Speaker—

Hon Mr Caplan: Is that a prop?

Mr Dunlop: No, it's not a prop. It's a kind of way to determine the height of our young people.

The third area, and a very important area, is, who will carry birth certificates for the young people? We have a number of people we would have to work with, among which are, of course, grandparents.

I have three little granddaughters. They all require a special seat. My daughter and her husband have a minivan; I think it's a Dodge Caravan minivan. Three of the seats have specific booster seats, baby seats, whatever you want to call them. They're for the specific ages of these three little girls. We have to transfer those seats to our vehicles so we can take those little girls with us, and so do the babysitter and the other grandparents.

We will have to have, at all times, copies of birth certificates that the police will be able to monitor in case we're pulled over with those three little girls. I think it's important we make sure everyone in the province understands that you will have to have a copy of their birth certificates. At that age that's the primary source of identification, of the proof of age.

1720

The other thing is the cost of the seats we have to identify with. My understanding is that the baby seats or the car seats you buy today, and I haven't bought a car seat for a while, are tax-exempt, that there is no provincial sales tax. Maybe I can get a nod from the Speaker because he knows a lot about this, but I believe the car seats are tax-exempt.

I really and truly believe that Mr Arnott's bill, which is Bill 77, a private member's bill, should exempt these seats as well for up to 80 pounds. If you're going to do it for kids up to 40 pounds and they're included, why would this not be included? It's at least a break. You're probably discriminating against children who are between 40 pounds and 80 pounds if you're not able to provide a tax exemption for them. I think even their shoes are tax-exempt at that age.

It's important that this House, and Mr Sorbara because it's probably a financial issue, take a serious look at Mr Arnott's bill in light of the fact that these are the families, these people who have children who are up to 80 pounds at that age group, who were the hardest hit by Dalton

McGuinty's budget we received last May 18. They're already receiving much higher gas prices because Paul Martin won't move on that. They're receiving higher hydro prices because Dalton McGuinty broke a promise, and the same with natural gas prices. I'm trying to be nice here, but the fact of the matter is that this latest piece of legislation actually hits the average Ontario family for, I believe, around $2,000. If you are going to pass this legislation, and I understand the NDP is supporting this bill and probably some of our members will support it, at least give them the exemption and pass Mr Arnott's bill.

I think it's the right thing to do. I'm always hearing the Premier say that: "It's the right thing to do." The right thing is to make sure these young people, these young family members get an exemption on these booster seats and car seats that are being required at an extra cost to the family as a result of Bill 73.

The other thing I want to talk a little bit about is the irony—I know there have been studies done, and Ms Sandals, the member from Guelph-Wellington, dealt with this a little bit in her comments, but one thing that a lot of people are puzzled with in our transportation system today is the fact that we have all these fancy air bags and booster seats, car seats, all these restrictions for the grandparents and parents, in cars, minivans, vans, half-ton trucks, but right today—and I understand what the member from Guelph-Wellington said. I do understand that school buses are probably the safest place for children to be, but it has always amazed me that there have never been seat belts or booster seats in school buses. The same little child, the little junior K child who weighs 35 pounds or 25 pounds, hops on a school bus and they sit three or four to a seat, no booster seats, no car seats, no seat belts and down the highway they go.

When they get out at grandma's house, they hop into some elaborate seat in a fancy truck with air bags, and it is puzzling. I know there are all kinds of comments people can make around that, and I know the school bus operators wouldn't want me to talk about adding seat belts and booster seats to school buses, but it has always been strange that it actually does not apply. I don't think there ever has really been a move to go in that direction.

The other area: I talked to Mr Takhar about this. I had a late show one night with him because I didn't like his answer, because I know when we were consulting on this piece of legislation, he didn't really consult with very many police services in our province. I thought the minister owed the Police Association of Ontario and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police the opportunity to comment, because it's going to take a lot of additional police officers to enforce this particular piece of legislation.

Mr McGuinty, like our government, promised 1,000 new police officers in the election campaign last year. The police services are already under tremendous pressure—things like grow ops, the gang-related crimes, the fact that now we're seeing some downtown car chases. It's amazing that now they will require more police services to implement this, and I don't know how they're going to do a very good job of it.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): They have money for a language cop, though.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, they have money for a language police officer but not for checking out booster seats.

I think the minister owed that. Apparently, he has talked to the OPP, because he mentioned Deputy Commissioner Pilon in his comments, that one day he had talked to him about this. I applaud Mr Pilon, because I know him well and he would give good advice.

Something has come up in the bill, and I think we need clarification again from the government. I'd like to read it out. It's under the section called "Limitation." It's subsection 207(7) and it reads: "An owner of a motor vehicle convicted of an offence under section 128 on the basis of evidence acquired through the use of a photo radar system or under subsection 175(19) or (20) is not liable to imprisonment, a probation order under subsection 72(1) of the Provincial Offences Act...."

I am concerned about the words "photo radar" being brought into this piece of legislation. Why do we have the words "photo radar"? It doesn't exist in the province of Ontario. Why is photo radar in Bill 73?

Mr Runciman: Is this another secret?

Mr Dunlop: I think it's a secret. I'm going to tell you what I think it is. I'm getting some looks from over there, but I think this is a way to sneak photo radar into Ontario again. We already know that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is on record as saying this is nothing but a cash grab.

The Premier just this winter made the statement to the media that yes, it's a cash generator. I think what the minister is planning on doing—and maybe he hasn't even been brought into the loop—is to bring in photo radar. Maybe Mr McGuinty knows it in his office, but I can tell you, this is a way that they would be able to sneak this into a school zone, put a few photo radar cameras in place, implement that program and say, "Well, it's strictly for the school zones," and then build on that throughout the rest of the province. That's my concern, because I cannot understand why you would even use the words "photo radar" in this bill.

There's going to be lots of opportunity to debate this, and all kinds of people are going to have Qs and As on this, so we'll be able to get a good clarification, I'm sure, even in the next few minutes, on why photo radar is mentioned in this particular piece of legislation.

I only have a couple of minutes left, but our problem on this side of the House is that we believe it is a tax grab. If it's not a tax grab, I think the government should make an amendment, and any money collected under this program should go to the school boards—not into the municipality; not into the OPP. This is my idea. I haven't caucused this with our people or anything like that; I've just thought this up. If it's not a cash grab, let's put the money back into the schools. Why not? Why would it go to the municipalities? Why would it go to the OPP or to Minister Sorbara's ministry? It should go into the school boards. They're always saying they need more money. It would help them with their transportation costs.

A little earlier, Mr Klees was criticized because he said it was a tax grab. I still believe the $2,000 for someone who isn't even driving the car, who will receive that fine—it's just not fair.

1730

Some person, some little old lady who has never had a speeding ticket in her life, not even a parking ticket, lends her car to her nephew. The guy goes by a school bus, and she gets the $2,000 fine, a bill in the mail. There's something wrong with that. So if it is going to pass, let's make an amendment to the piece of legislation. I'm getting some nods—

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Let's give it to the school boards.

Mr Dunlop: Let's give it to the school boards. They need the money. Mr Kennedy obviously hasn't come up with enough money in his budget, because I've seen our grant allocations—very disappointing. I thought, in our board, we'd probably end up with another $30 million or $40 million. I'm extremely disappointed, for all the way he talked about and hammered our government for years. Now all of a sudden, we haven't got enough money. So I'm very, very disappointed that not nearly enough money came to the Simcoe county school boards as a result of this budget. I've just gone over the grant allocations, and we definitely have a problem with the amount of money that the Simcoe Muskoka and the Simcoe district school board have received in my riding.

I asked the question a little earlier, and Mr Parsons tried to answer the question. I know he didn't come up with the exact details I asked, but I'm really concerned, and I think our caucus will be concerned as we draft the regulations and as we look at the bill either going to committee or passed in third reading. We really do have to know who can identify that licence plate.

Again, I mentioned earlier possibly someone driving their John Deere tractor in a field, picking up hay or something. He spots a car going by, knows the licence plates, sees the licence plates from a good angle. Can he have that driver charged, or that car person charged? At the gate, can Grandma, who sees the car go by the school bus, actually have the driver charged?

All these questions have to be answered about this bill. There's not one person in this building, not one person in this room who I'm sure has anything against public safety, community safety and the safety of our children and our grandchildren. There's not one. I speak on behalf of our caucus, and I'm sure I'm correct with that. But the fact is, this bill, as it stands right now, is a tax grab as far as the fine goes for the owner of the car.

Second of all, we absolutely have to see Mr Arnott's bill passed to give these hard-working families a break. They need a break because of the McGuinty budget that is costing over $2,000 per person, per family. We need to know that everybody in this House will support Mr Arnott's bill. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker: I was going to give you an extra two minutes, but you thought it was time. I'm pleased to recognize, in questions and comments, the member for Timmons-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: I think this is the appropriate time to raise this particular e-mail that I actually got from a Mr Terry McGarry in regard to the comments made by my friend, and it reads as follows: "Dalton, I must give you credit for being consistent." That's a good start in an e-mail. "Your government consistently introduces the most ridiculous legislation one can imagine."

I wanted to use this in response to one of the comments from the Conservative Party. It goes on:

"Just when I think I've heard it all, you and your people come up with something even more bizarre. Case in point, proposed legislation on car seats for kids. As a grandparent I cannot understand your logic. With this law, I have to put my 10-year-old granddaughter in a bumper seat (just because she weighs less than 80 pounds) on the rare occasions that I drive her somewhere. Based on her size, I'll still have her in a bumper seat when she's a teenager. (Want to go to your grade 8 grad? Sure, honey, just hop into your bumper seat, and poppa will drive you there.)

"If you really want to keep the kids safer, make it a law that school buses have to have seat belts or bumper seats for the smaller kids.

"For God's sake stop with the stupid ideas!"

Those are the comments of Mr McGarry, and I would like to hear what my good friend Mr Dunlop has to say about those particular views that are brought forward.

I think it's an interesting point that he raises in the e-mail, because on the one hand we're going to do something in order to protect younger people and infants in cars, but we're not going to require that there are bumper seats and/or safety belts in school buses in order to protect kids.

I think he raises, I've got to say, an interesting point. Are we saying that children who are in our cars are more at risk because Grandpa drives faster, or are we saying something else? I don't know. It's one view—I'm not saying I share this particular view entirely—but I think it raises an interesting point. Should we be looking at doing something in regard to school buses? So I'd like to hear what my good friend Mr Dunlop has to say about this e-mail from Terry McGarry, especially the part that says, "Your government consistently introduces the most ridiculous legislation one can imagine."

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I was going say how somewhat enjoyable it was to see some rationality and some good thought and debate on an issue on which it would appear that most of us are really in accord. But I would say to the member for Timmins-James Bay, who just spoke in his two-minuter, I think he knows that in the legislation there is a ceiling on age. And it's not just related to that.

Mr Bisson: Yes, I know that.

Mr Patten: So hopefully your friend will be watching or listening or will read Hansard. Because if it was based on weight, there would be some members here in this House that would still be sitting in one of those booster seats.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): Right behind you.

Mr Patten: That's true. The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex might in fact be required to sit in one of those seats; certainly not the member from Timmins.

There will be further opportunities for debate on this, and discussion and review at committee. Therefore, those considerations that are put forward are there. But I would make the assumption that all members in this House are truly in agreement that when it comes to any kind of threat to life, particularly with children and young people, we want to do whatever we can as responsible adults to ensure that we contain and protect them from harm, and ensure that they in fact will be protected from undue behaviour.

Mr Runciman: I want to compliment the member for Simcoe North for his contribution to the debate. Certainly we do have some concerns about the legislation. We'll hope, as the member opposite indicated, that there will be an opportunity at committee for friendly amendments, and that we won't see the Liberal members of committee operating in lockstep to the dictates of the whip, as has been the practice to date.

The member raised the issue of photo radar and the reference to that in the legislation and expressed his concern, and I think the concerns of our caucus. I think they're legitimate. Despite the protestations of government ministers and government members that there are no plans to reintroduce photo radar into Ontario, I think that members on this side, and the public generally, can be somewhat sceptical about those assurances, given the track record of this government over the past eight years in terms of breaking promises, saying one thing to the public and then, a few short weeks later, doing quite the opposite. Given the issues raised in question period today, it apparently doesn't mean anything to the Premier of the province, even when he lays his hand on a Bible and swears allegiance, takes an oath of allegiance going into the executive council of this province. That does not mean what it says when you take the oath. "Put your hand on the Bible and swear" doesn't mean what you're saying. I think it should be of serious concern to every Ontarian when the Premier of the province makes that kind of a statement and takes that kind of an action with respect to an oath of allegiance when you enter the executive council. If another member of cabinet breaks the oath, we would appreciate, we would understand, we would call for their immediate resignation. And I'm sure the Premier would do so. What happens now that the Premier has breached his own oath?

1740

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I've had the opportunity to sit and listen to some of the debate on the bill, and I can tell you that it sounds quite interesting to me. Although there may be a few pieces that need to be ironed out or made more clear, it seems to me that what I've heard, particularly changes in regard to the way we will treat cars that pass school buses with their lights flashing—I think that's extremely important.

My son, in fact, takes a school bus every day, has done so for his entire time in school. I have in fact myself personally watched cars disobey the current law regarding passing school buses with their lights flashing. As a parent, I can tell you it's an extremely frightening thing. It was extremely frightening one particular day when I watched a child about to run in front of the bus, not quite knowing what the protocol was from the kid's perspective. This child was about to run out in front of the bus, not realizing where the caution line was. There's a bar that comes down, and the kids are supposed to stop before there and make sure there's nothing coming. That didn't happen and a car ran the lights. It could have been a very difficult, very awful and horrible, tragic situation. Luckily, that didn't happen; the tragedy didn't occur. However, the driver still managed to abuse his driving privileges by not obeying the laws with respect to the flashing lights.

I applaud the member for bringing forward this bill. I think it's going to improve the accountability of drivers and, frankly, the accountability of car owners in making sure that, if they are lending out their car, they're lending it out to people who are responsible drivers and who understand the laws of Ontario. I think that's a very positive thing. Again, I will likely be supporting this bill, but I believe there are a few amendments that will probably come to clean it up a little bit.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes to reply.

Mr Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Timmins-James Bay; Ottawa Centre; Bob Runciman, my colleague from Leeds-Grenville; and Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East for their comments. I want to congratulate you, Andrea, on your election. It's good to have you here, and it's nice to have the NDP as our neighbours here on the opposition side.

Mr Bisson: We like being your neighbours.

Mr Dunlop: Yes. The dynamics have changed here since that's happened this week. We see the fear on the side of the Liberals. We've seen Mr McGuinty today—he looked bad, pathetic. You know how bad it was when he had to stand up because he was afraid of Mr Runciman's supplementary. That's how pathetic it was today.

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat.

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It is my understanding in questions and comments that they should be directed to the debate at hand.

The Acting Speaker: Yes, I would agree that in response to questions and comments members should attempt to respond to the questions and comments in terms of their discussion. I would remind all members of the House that that in fact is the procedure around here.

Mr Dunlop: I can understand why you wouldn't want me to respond to Ontario's weak link. There's no question about that. But I was simply referring to Mr Runciman, who gave comments today. He was commenting on Mr McGuinty's weaknesses today. The fact of the matter is—

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: Point of order.

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: This is pathetic. He's already ruled on it.

Mr Speaker, I do want to say a few things that are of concern here. One is a sneaky way of bringing back photo radar. There's no question about it. Just say that photo radar won't be brought back. That's all I want to hear you say: "Photo radar will not be brought back." Somebody can say that.

Second of all, we have to adopt Mr Arnott's bill. Bill 77 should be adopted because those booster seats should be tax-exempt because of Dalton McGuinty's budget, which is costing every Ontario family over $1,000.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: I'm so glad to have this opportunity to do a one-hour leadoff. Oh, man, you don't know how happy I am.

Mr Runciman: Oh, no.

Mr Bisson: What do you mean, "Oh, no"? I was going to say something nice about you. I just want to say I'm happy to have the Conservatives as our neighbours again. I want to let the Conservatives know we are good neighbours. We don't make a lot of noise. We tend to share. We like inflicting pain on the government with the official opposition. We believe we should be working together to make sure we hold that particular government accountable, because this government, you know, brought this bill in today—and I've got to say, we're going to be voting for this bill. But where are all these other things that they—

Applause.

Mr Bisson: Thank you. I just started. Isn't that wonderful? Thank you, thank you.

I've just got to say, in the context of this bill, the government could have chosen to bring many other things into this Legislature today. They could have, for example, been debating issues having to do with why it is they're breaking election promises they've made since being elected. Remember the Oak Ridges moraine? Great big promises during the election that they would stop the development on the Oak Ridges moraine. They brought forward a broken promise. It wasn't 10 days after they were elected and it was gone. But instead, we're here today on the Highway Traffic Act: a great bill, a wonderful bill, a bill that we're going to support and we want a few amendments on but that we think is great.

Applause again, please, because there were other broken promises. I've got a list in my office and I've got to go through the countdown. It's like 200-and-some-odd promises that they made, and of the legislation that they've introduced in this Legislature up to now, over 70% of what they've done is a broken promise. I've got to say that where I come from, when you break 70% of your promises—or to put it the other way, if you don't do 70% of what it is you promised you'd do, that's considered a failure. I think we've got to send them back to remedial election school. We've got to remind this government that when you're out there campaigning and you're telling people on the doorstep, "We're going to do this and we're going to do that"—my good friend Mr Wrye comes in. I'm so glad that Mr Bill Wrye is coming in, a former member, a former Minister of Labour and transportation and everything. He knows, because he was a member here when it was important, when members were running in an election, to do what they said they were going to do.

We understand that at times governments have to adjust. We understand, for example, that the Conservatives, who made their motto and their creed on doing what they said they would do, at times had to break some of the things they said because of circumstance. I think most people, fair-minded as we are in Ontario, are prepared, as they were for Mr Wrye when he was Minister of Labour—I remember well the whole occupational disease file when Mr Wrye was the Minister of Labour and I had to go to his office as a steelworker then in order to hold his feet to the fire. I remember Mr Wrye. I used to deal with him way back then. I used to have to hold his feet to the fire when it came to the whole issue of industrial diseases and the promises to workers the Liberals had made that had not been kept.

Every now and then I accept that a government is going to have to maybe amend its ways. But these people aren't just amending their ways; they're having total amnesia, I've got to say. I ran in that election, along with the rest of the people here and about 300 other people who weren't elected, and I remember what these Liberals had to say. Here we are today, debating this Highway Traffic Statute Law Amendment Act, which I think is a good bill and I say again that we're going to vote for, but where are all the bills that we need that keep the election promises? Where are they? There are so many.

For example, on the issue of auto insurance, as my friend Rosario Marchese is saying, people are being whacked by auto insurance increases when these guys promised, on the doorstep and in debates and across this province, that they would do something to keep auto insurance rates from going through the roof. This government hides behind the façade of having done a couple of things last fall and this winter, but I'll tell you that as I go around and people either come to my constituency office or call me, send e-mails or letters or I run across them, people are upset. They're saying, "They promised they were going to do something, and they didn't." They say, "Thank God, Gilles, we voted for you, because at least we know where you stand, and you stand on our side." I just remind the government that you've got to keep that in mind.

But we're here on the Highway Traffic Act. It's such an important piece of legislation that I think it needs to be spoken to. I notice my good friend was about to get up on a point of order or leave—I'm trying to determine which so I can continue. You're leaving? OK. That means I can continue. Good.

Mrs Sandals: Do you think you deserve a point of order?

Mr Bisson: I might, at times. I've been known to stray a little bit. In the context of the debate of this legislation, I think it's important to point out that we're here and are probably going to be spending two or three days of debate on a bill—

Mr Chudleigh: Is that all?

Mr Bisson: —well, we might do more; who knows?—that we essentially agree on. Why? Because this government doesn't want to keep its promises. I just say to the government that I was out there last week, like most of you, for constituency week. People were stopping me on the street, and when I was knocking on doors for Charlie Angus, our NDP candidate in the Timmins-James Bay riding, it was just amazing. You go to door after door and people were just saying, "That guy Dalton McGuinty"—I can't repeat in this Legislature what I was told.

In fact, I got into the elevator of my apartment building this morning—because as members who are from outside of Toronto, we're allowed an apartment to stay in when we're in Toronto. I was getting in the elevator. You know what it's like in apartment buildings in Toronto: Hardly anybody ever speaks to each other in elevators. The conversation was just amazing. One guy came in, and I said, "Good morning." He said, "It's a great morning if you're not a Liberal." That was the first comment he made. The rest of the comments about Dalton McGuinty I can't repeat in here. If I did, the Speaker would find me out of order, and it would be unparliamentary and, I think, a little bit crass.

Mr Chudleigh: You could withdraw.

Mr Bisson: I could withdraw, but I want to keep this very civil, so I say to the government: Good bill, but we should be doing something to keep our election promises.

Let me speak specifically to a couple of points on the bill.

Applause.

Mr Bisson: I was waiting for the applause. You're with me. I'm glad. This is good.

The other thing is, my good friend Mr Parsons talked about age, and I'm getting to the point where I've got to wear these things now. I used to just do them for show at one point, but now I have to wear them to see what is written on the paper.

1750

The bill essentially does three things: The bill deals with the introduction of the issue of booster seats, it deals with the issue of people passing school buses when the lights are flashing and how to charge those people and it deals with the issue of graduated driver's licences to prevent young people from having additional passengers in a car, as a measure of safety.

I've only got about six minutes left today in this opening lead, and I think I'm going to deal with the last part first, just very quickly. It's an interesting concept. I've got to say I don't totally disagree with what the government is trying to do here, because what they're saying is that anybody, a driver who first of all gets their G1, then moves on to the G2 licence, will have a sort of stepped ability to have passengers in the car. We're saying that for the six months the driver can only carry one passenger if the passenger is under the age of 19, and for the balance of the G2, you would be allowed up to three.

That's an interesting thing because I heard some people across the way say—I see in the briefing note we've been given by the government, the appendix and stuff we got with the bill when it came in, that the stats indicate there are more young people who die in car accidents who are under the age of 19, so the logic is that if you reduce the number of passengers in the car, it is somehow or other going to make the driver safer.

I wonder if the issue is that it's one of those things where we say, "Liars figure and figures lie," because it only stands to reason, I think, that if you have a driver who's under the age of 19 who has only one passenger in the car, compared to what they're able to do now with two or three or four passengers, that driver, I would argue, is probably no safer or dangerous on the basis of how many people are in the car.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: No, hear me out. This is an issue I want to bring to committee. I'm not totally disagreeing with what the assumption is in the bill; I'm just wondering if we should look at these numbers a little more closely.

If I'm working out stats that say how many young people died under the age of 19 who were passengers in cars driven by drivers under a G1 or G2 licence, it only stands to reason at this point that if that G1 or G2 licence got into an accident, there was an ability to have more passengers, so there are more fatalities or injuries.

If, on the other hand, we were under your new regime, for the same period of time, it stands to reason that we would have fewer injuries or fatalities, because you start off with the concept of having fewer passengers in the car. So the issue is the driver. That's the only point I'm making here. I don't totally disagree—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Just listen. It's my hour; just let me make the point. You can get up and respond to this all you want in the two minutes you're going to get at the end of the speech.

I just want to say for the record that I don't disagree that there are times where a young person gets into a car and is more reckless because he—more likely he, but he or she—is being encouraged by the—what do they call it?—peer pressure inside the car. I don't discount that. All I'm saying is I think the numbers are a little bit distorted. I think there are instances where you would still have the same accident, you would have the same conditions, and it's not necessarily because there were other people in the car; it's because the young driver may have some bad habits. That's all I'm saying.

It would be interesting in committee to talk to some of the people who worked out the stats to see if that's the case, because I'm a big believer that regulation is necessary and laws are necessary to protect the public good, but I also believe we have to be careful sometimes not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I just want to look at that number. I agree that at times people get urged on because there are more people in the car, but I can also understand that it's driver habits we have to get to.

Certainly, young drivers today are much safer than they were, let's say, 10 years ago, since the introduction of the graduated driver's licence system. The whole idea

of why the NDP government put that in place in the first place was to find a measured way of being able to increase the ability of somebody to drive, not to go from the age of 16, as I did. On my 16th birthday, I ran down to the licence bureau, I wrote my beginner's exam and I was in there with my driver's test within about three days. So I was barely 16 with a driver's licence and a Dodge in 1963, driving not fast, not with a lot of people in the car, but very slowly up Third Avenue, if I remember correctly what I was doing. Back then it was called cruising, but that's a whole other debate that I want to get into later.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: The point I want to make is that not all young people speed in their cars. Some of them are cruising, but that's another story.

The point I make is that the graduated licence system made sure that young people like me had a measured and graduated way of getting licences over a longer period of time. So there were some restrictions.

I was born in the month of May. I remember that I went down on a trip with my friends at some time in June, after I got my licence. I took my 1963 Dodge, and me and my buddy jumped in and drove down to Toronto to watch a movie or something and do whatever we were doing in Toronto at the time, and on to Highway 400 for the first time. I remember I was a little petrified, coming from northern Ontario. It made sense to have a graduated licence.

I understand what the government is trying to do here. I just think we need to look at the numbers a little more closely.

The other quick point I want to make—we've got a couple of minutes left and I just want to take a look at the other part—is that the legislation says that the restrictions would not apply if accompanied by a fully licensed driver with at least four years of driving experience or if the passengers are family members.

I again make the point that if we're going to be consistent, if you've got under-19-year-olds as passengers—listen, if you put my brother and me together back then; Jeez, we were quite the pair, and we are still today. You've got to come to the cottage in the summertime. To say that Claude and Gilles getting in the car were less likely to get in an accident than Claude and my buddy Mike, I've got to say, doesn't stand up. I think if you're trying to get at the 19-year-olds issue and peer pressure, many of us have good relationships with our brothers and sisters. I can tell you, my brother and I were known as being pretty close, and we're still the best of friends today, and we're just as crazy as any of our friends put together. So that's a bit of a flaw in the bill that we need to rethink a little bit. Is the issue that they're under 19 years old, or is the issue that they're safer because they're my family members? I would say, if I just look at my brother and me at 16 or 17 years old, it's certainly the case.

Mr Speaker, it being almost 6 of the clock, I would suggest that this House recess until the next time we can deal with this legislation. I'll continue my speech at that time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for your assistance. It is indeed 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until a quarter to seven tonight.

The House adjourned at 1757.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 1 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1er juin 2004

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004
SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 31, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 83, An Act to implement budget measures / Projet de loi 83, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask for unanimous consent to stand down the rest of Mr Prue's lead as he's not able to be here tonight.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Further debate?

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): Public infrastructure is essential to our quality of life in Ontario. Public infrastructure allows our social, economic and environmental quality of life to continue uninterrupted. I believe that public infrastructure is taken for granted. This has led to complacency in Ontario.

As a result, Ontario faces a growing infrastructure challenge. This challenge has been well documented. Over the last century, we have developed a vast network of transportation, water and power systems, along with educational and health facilities across Ontario. These infrastructure assets, estimated to be worth $1.6 trillion nationally, have helped create a robust economy and allowed an unsurpassed quality of life.

But many components of our vast infrastructure network are reaching the end of their service lives. What's more, a lack of sustained investment in public infrastructure is jeopardizing its safety and reliability. The lack of sustained investment has resulted in out-of-control infrastructure debt estimated upwards of $20 billion in Ontario.

Through our budget and four-year plan, we will stop this neglect that happened under the last government. This accumulated infrastructure deficit represents a significant debt, with a more direct impact on Ontario than the fiscal debt, since it affects Ontarians' health, safety, and well-being. Costs of neglect escalate with time.

This government has started the detailed planning of a comprehensive, multi-year strategy to reduce infrastructure debt and undo the past neglect. There is significant need for investment in municipal roads and bridge infrastructure. We need to do more than double the current yearly investment of $1.5 billion in road infrastructure to address the backlog in municipal road repairs. The current municipal road and bridge investment needs are over $5.7 billion.

Deferring maintenance and rehabilitation is not a cost-effective strategy. The cost of road maintenance and repairs are compared below. On-time maintenance costs about $750 per year, per kilometre, per lane. If we go with a lack of maintenance, which has been the past experience, after 12 years, when the roads have to be rehabilitated, it costs $80,000 per kilometre, per lane—more than 10 times the proper maintenance. If the lack of maintenance goes to 15 years and requires reconstruction, it's $250,000 per kilometre, per lane.

Real investment in municipal roads declined during the 1990-2001 period. This was a period that I had records of but I'm sure it continued to 2003. That was part of the provincial highways downloading and expansion of the system. Considering the growth of the municipal road system due to expansion and provincial highway transfers, there has been a significant decline in investment in municipal roads on a per kilometre basis during this period.

1850

Prior to downloading, the province provided conditional grants to municipalities for roads. On average, between 1992 and 1995 these conditional grants amounted to $400 million for capital and $350 million for operating purposes on an annual basis to municipalities alone. Many municipalities lack sufficient resources and financial capacity to undertake the necessary repair and maintenance programs for their road and bridge structures. The ability of municipalities to finance improvements has been constrained due to the limited tax base and the need to compete for funding with capital projects and other priority areas, such as water infrastructure.

Assessing the current state of municipal roads and bridges is complicated due to the limited and dated information available. There are 12,000 municipal bridges in Ontario. An estimated 2,200 were in substandard condition and required an investment of approximately $1 billion. The needs are expected to be higher in 2003 as a result of underinvestment by municipalities in recent years. The cost could be higher depending on whether the

current state of bridges has deteriorated to the point of requiring a bridge replacement versus repair only. The average cost of a bridge repair is $500,000 compared with a range of $4 million to $10 million per bridge if they have to be replaced.

In this year's provincial budget, the government is taking the high road. It has committed itself to $3.3 billion this year to improve roads, sewers and other infrastructure. For the first time, this government is developing a 10-year strategic infrastructure investment plan. We're committing $505 million for municipal and local infrastructure investments, creating the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority to provide financing for public infrastructure and to issue infrastructure renewal bonds to allow Ontarians to share in financing infrastructure investment.

We are partnering with the federal government to help small and rural communities through the five-year $900-million Canada-Ontario municipal-rural infrastructure fund to improve water quality, upgrade sewage treatment, waste management and repair local roads and bridges.

The success of all economic, social and environmental policies and programs depends on sound investment in public infrastructure, as I believe that public infrastructure is in fact the foundation on which our quality of life is built. This budget makes that investment.

Dealing with schools: The conditions that exist today inside our public schools are intolerable. Schools are literally crumbling, roofs are leaking, buckets in classrooms catch raindrops and oil furnace boilers are no longer functioning. Premier McGuinty and Minister Kennedy recently announced an amortization fund: $200 million on an annual basis that will leverage $2.1 billion in financing that school boards can obtain to improve their infrastructure.

The government has made a substantial commitment to renew school facilities to ensure every student is educated in a clean, safe and comfortable school. This long-term commitment starts in 2005-06. The total of infrastructure upgrades required for schools is about $8 billion.

Ernie Eves's empty promises to take responsibility for over 1,000 bridges a year was estimated to cost $333 million a year for the next 12 years. That government only budgeted $41 million to pay for the uploading of rural bridges—a commitment but no dollars.

On April 19 and April 21 of this year, the member from Oak Ridges rose in this House and suddenly realized there were unsafe bridges in the province. After eight years of neglect, we have that party discovering that there are unsafe bridges. Their neglect caused the situation.

The way it came about was that that member got up and spoke of an "extremely well researched" article by the Toronto Star "that relates to a very serious safety issue that demands your attention. It speaks to the literally hundreds of bridges across this province that are in a serious state of disrepair in many cases—"

It's strange that a former Minister of Transportation should have to read in that article what the eight years of that government had caused.

Also on April 21, he was asking about these unsafe bridges, and of course they've been unsafe because there's been no investment in them over the many years.

This government is prepared to work with municipalities. The Minister of Transportation stated in this House that we are prepared to give them a new deal so they can address their long-term issues. This government takes its responsibilities seriously, but they never did for eight and a half years. As the Minister of Transportation, the member from Oak Ridges did nothing and had to read in the Star that the bridges were unsafe. Just imagine that kind of neglect.

The McGuinty government has joined with the federal government for a new Canada-Ontario municipal road infrastructure fund, COMRIF, a major commitment to invest in capital projects that will build strong, sustainable communities in Ontario. The fund will provide $900 million over the course of five years for the renewal of public infrastructure in small towns and rural communities across Ontario. The fund is designed to support infrastructure renewal needs of cities and towns with populations under 250,000. Small urban centres and rural municipalities will now have better financial tools to plan and manage their own future. Hundreds of communities in all parts of this province will benefit from this new fund, which will help smaller municipalities provide clean drinking water, better waste water treatment facilities, fix roads and repair bridges, ultimately strengthening communities across the province and delivering real, positive change to Ontario.

Apart from representing our government's commitment to building strong communities across Ontario, this fund also represents the new spirit of co-operation between federal, provincial and municipal governments. For the first time, we have full participation from all three levels of government in developing a program to renew the public face of Ontario. The previous government engaged in a war of attrition with other levels of government. Political posturing and endless bickering crippled the policies and programs that survived those quarrels. In contrast, our government has achieved a level of co-operation with our counterparts in the federal government and, with our partners at the municipal level, it is already yielding results. We no longer waste our energy in pointless bickering with the federal government and, for the first time, municipal officials, through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, are contributing their knowledge and expertise in the design of a program that will deal with their own.

Many of us are familiar with the aging nuclear plants that are coming near the end of their service. Despite a vastness of clean, renewable energy, Ontario continues to rely on dirty resources and energy like coal.

What has happened in the past eight years and was done to infrastructure in Ontario? We have $8 billion of undone maintenance in schools, $4 billion in undone

maintenance in roads, $3 million in bridges and $10 million in energy. The federal-provincial-municipal team will bring back the public infrastructure so essential to our quality of life in Ontario. Our budget is tough and will be difficult for Ontarians, but the additional revenues will, in the long run, contribute greatly to our quality of life and the economic strength of our great province.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Yes, since you said that, I'll recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It gives me great pride to have an opportunity to participate in the debate on our government's first budget. I say right from the get-go that this is a budget beyond anything else that delivers so much on the extraordinary promise that we made with respect to Ontario's health care system. It is, in fact, a budget which fuels a transformation agenda, which finds its roots in the great work that Roy Romano did on behalf of our country. You have before you in this budget that we offer to the people of Ontario a move forward on significant efforts to transform our health care system toward one which provides a much greater enhancement to the quality of services Ontarians cherish.

I have the opportunity almost every day to make a speech in which I'm always pleased to say that I believe that medicare is the very best expression of Canadian values. If this is true, and I believe with all of my heart it is, then we find in this presentation of this government's budget by my friend the honourable member for Vaughan-King-Aurora a commitment to this most essential of public services. I want to say right from the get-go that we talk about health care a lot, we talk about technology and bricks and mortars. But at the end of the day, this is really the ultimate human endeavour, with people delivering care to other people.

I want to start with a quote that comes from Dr John Rapin, president of the Ontario Medical Association. This is what he said in response to our budget:

"I want to applaud the government for making good on its promises to increase funding to long-term care, mental health, home care and children's mental health services in Ontario. Expanding funding for children's immunization programs and public health is long overdue in Ontario, and will improve health prevention and promotion initiatives."

That's from John Rapin, and John Rapin knows that our government, in difficult and pressing fiscal circumstances, has moved forward with a commitment that is measured in dollars at an additional $2.2 billion for the purposes of delivering on quality health care in our province and measured in percentages at 7.3%.

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Above all else, what this is a reflection of is our government's commitment to fulfill the promises that we have made to enhance the essential public services in the province of Ontario. What we find in this transformation agenda is a drive to community, a drive to provide resources at the community level, as close to people's homes as possible. Because we know that not only is that desirable from the patient's standpoint, but we also know that delivering health care in the setting that is closest to home often also means we are delivering it in the least costly environment possible.

I want to focus on five initiatives that are all part of this drive to community; five significant investment areas, all of which will have the effect of improving the underlying health conditions of Ontarians, but will also have the important effect of taking some pressure off our hospitals, which have for too long now been asked to do too much because of a sheer absence of investment in other pieces of health care to be found at the community level.

On public health, we've had ample evidence that our public health apparatus in this province has been diminished and we've moved forward as a government to fulfill a key recommendation of both the Walker and Campbell reports that have been brought to us as a result of Ontario's experiences with SARS. Those reports both asked us to make a commitment as a government to move back toward 75% of the funding for public health. We see the first instalment of this because we understand that in order to have a good system of health care, we have to have a public health apparatus at the public health level across the province that gives us the capacity to help keep people well in the first place and to protect us from those emergent threats like SARS.

A second piece of the puzzle is about long-term care. I am enormously proud that my parliamentary assistant, the member from Nipissing, was involved in doing an awfully good body of work. And I am extraordinarily proud that this government, the Dalton McGuinty government, in its first budget moves forward in this year with a $406-million new investment in long-term care; $191 million of that targeted at those beds we already have in place to make sure the loved ones we have—our parents and our grandparents—are given the right and dignity to a quality of care that can only be enhanced with the fact that as a result of an investment of $191 million, some 2,000 additional employees will be deployed in these long-term-care settings to enhance the care for our loved ones.

Home care is a third piece of our drive to community. This year home care will see $100 million in additional funding, $70 million targeted at post-acute stay, $20 million targeted at the care we provide for people in our communities who are struggling with mental health challenges, and $10 million to enhance our capacity to provide end-of-life care for those people who have come to the end of the road. To give them the opportunity to die in dignity and to die in the peace of home and in the care and comfort of their loved ones, our government makes a commitment of $10 million this year to help to develop a dramatic expansion of our capacities for end-of-life care.

We don't stop there. We move forward with primary health care reform. This phrase "primary health care" has come to mean many things. When associated with the previous government it has come to mean failure. But

when we talk about it, we're talking about family health teams. I'm pleased to say our government is moving forward on our commitment to bring 150 family health teams, an interdisciplinary approach of doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners and other health care providers working together in a team, all focused on the individual patient—an investment over the next four years of $600 million to make this dream a reality for those one million Ontarians, who, as a result of the previous government's lack of progress, have no access to basic care, no access in connection to a doctor. We are moving forward with a $600-million investment for primary care, which will make an enormous difference.

Addictions and mental health: One of the things family practitioners tell me is their practices have been burdened with people who cannot receive anywhere else in the community the kind of support they need to deal with their addictions and underlying mental health. I have been heard to say that addiction and mental health treatment facilities in our province had not seen a new penny since before Bob Rae's hair turned grey. That's a long time ago now, 12 long years and no new money for addictions and mental health until this government's budget and a $65-million investment this year alone to enhance the quality of mental health, and a further $25-million investment for children's mental health.

I want to close by talking about how this is a seniors' budget. I heard with some shock the member for Toronto-Danforth talk earlier about how this budget wasn't for seniors. There is an additional $300 million this year to provide the necessary drugs. These enhancements I just mentioned with respect to home care and long-term care primarily focus on our seniors, giving them the independence to live in their homes and giving them dignity in long-term-care facilities.

I am also enormously proud our government recognizes that, for many people, access points in our health care system mean waiting too long for the surgeries they require. Our government is a results-based government. We've laid it on the line. We've clearly said that as a result of this budget, a health care budget with extraordinary new investments in health care, we're going to move forward in a dramatic expansion of our capacity to deal with cataracts. That's targeted largely at seniors and we know that's essential to their independence. There are more hips and knees because we find that they wear out, and we can restore quality of life for people who need them, including at least two colleagues of ours in the Legislature today. There are more resources for cancer and cardiac, and nine new MRI and CT sites over the course of the next year.

This is above all a budget that delivers on our commitments to enhance the quality of our public services, namely, health care, and I am honoured to have an opportunity to speak to it and to support it as well.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): In a few minutes our critic for finance will be addressing the House in his leadoff time. It's interesting to hear the Minister of Health talk about all the fantastic things that are happening. It's amazing to think that in our time in government from 1995 to 2003 we added $11 billion, but we didn't do it with a health premium. We didn't do it to the tune of $2,000 for every family in Ontario. That $2,000 is coming out of the pockets of the hard-working people, the working families of the province. That will have a dramatic effect on the economy. I don't know if people understand that. You take $2,000 from the average family—they don't all make $85,000 or $90,000 or $120,000 a year. Many people earn $30,000 or $40,000. They cannot afford that kind of money, but the health premium that he is bragging about with all the investments is on the hard-working people of Ontario, on the backs of their families.

It's disgusting to listen to this because the previous government, without Paul Martin, the architect of the destruction of health care in Canada, increased funding by $11 billion in that eight years. It is disappointing to hear the Minister of Health—

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: Now he has decided to heckle. I kept quiet while he was talking, but he has to babble away and do his heckling. The fact is that $11 billion was invested with a strong economy in the province of Ontario. Now here we go, with this health premium that is destroying the working families in Ontario. It's destroying, as far as I'm concerned, with the cutbacks—we've seen the delisting of services. It's very disappointing that we're debating a bill that is so draconian in its intent in Ontario.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): You've got to love the Liberals. I'm listening to George, and it isn't just George; it's a whole lot of Liberals. I think I heard George say tonight that the NDP didn't spend on health care either. You guys didn't spend. Neither did New Democrats. This is when we had a recession, in 1990. Liberals denied there was a recession, primero. Secondo—

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: Please, I've only got two minutes. Mind you, I'll be speaking in about a half-hour, for those who are tuning in, for about 20 minutes. Liberals denied that we had a—

Hon Mr Smitherman: They all tuned out.

Mr Marchese: George, please stick around.

Remember, we had a recession. Liberals denied that we had a recession.

Hon Mr Smitherman: That's why you caused the doctor shortage.

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Mr Marchese: Then, George says, New Democrats didn't spend enough on doctors or nurses, presumably, or on health care in general. So Liberals say: "Oh, my God, New Democrats had a deficit. We would never have such a deficit." At the same time, out of the other side of the Liberal mouth, they would say, "My God, you didn't spend enough on health care, on post-secondary education, on cities," or whatever it is you want to say. So you say, "You didn't spend enough. You've got a deficit."

Liberals always want to have it both ways, each and every time.

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): What's wrong with that?

Mr Marchese: Tony Ruprecht says, "What's wrong with that?" Nothing, nothing at all, except this is what defines Liberals. They want to have it both ways, because that's the way they are.

Georgie, I want to ask you, as a good Liberal when you put your hand to your heart, how do you defend attacking people who make $20,000 with a $300 premium in a couple of years and those earning a million only paying 900 bucks? As a Liberal, how do you defend that, George?

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): It's my pleasure to stand and make a couple of comments. I guess I was part of that process back when the NDP were in their recession. It was fascinating to remember the processes that were put in place around the social contract that have left an extraordinary legacy in this province. Maybe if we had a little reflection, we would recognize that the NDP do not have a particular track record of which they should be proud.

Having said that, the other thing that must be acknowledged is that the member from Trinity-Spadina was speaking about the process of health care. He referred to $20,000, and had the amount wrong. At $20,000 there is no premium.

The more important thing to recognize is that when you deal with a budget you have to acknowledge that we have a deficit. You may not like it. It exists. It may not have been what people thought it should have been. It may be more in some cases, it may have been less in other circumstances, but the fact of the matter is there is a deficit and you need to deal with it. So do you continue to spend money that you don't have, or do you acknowledge that you have a problem, find a solution and move forward? That's what this budget has done. It has recognized that in order to move forward you have to provide a process whereby you still can sustain and keep the reliability of your programs and your services, and at the same time put in place a process that deals with the deficit.

Some may choose not to do this. Others may choose to take another path. The Liberal government has chosen to be responsible in its process of dealing with this issue. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for this opportunity.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I have a question for the Minister of Health. I have a constituent, a Liberal, who came up to me and said, "I think those Tories are terrible." He bought hook, line and sinker that whole Peters report, but said he was convinced to vote Liberal because he saw George Smitherman standing with a big smile on his face over the head of Dalton McGuinty when he signed the taxpayers' protection pledge, promising a referendum.

This constituent is a Liberal. They voted for you. They accept the Peters report, but say, "Where's the referendum? The referendum wouldn't cost any more today than it would have the day you signed it." They said they liked John Baird's idea to piggyback it with the federal election, with Elections Canada, so it wouldn't cost a dime.

I saw, not just George Smitherman, but Laura Broten with a big smile. She was standing over there and cheering at Dalton signing the taxpayer protection pledge.

Mr Dunlop: So was Bob Delaney.

Mr Baird: So was Bob Delaney, I'm informed. So was Gerry Phillips.

The Acting Speaker: Would the member take his seat for one second. The member is well aware that you've got to refer to members by their riding names, not their personal names.

Mr Baird: Thank you very much, Speaker. But you see, they weren't members at the time, Speaker. It was the candidate for Laurel Broten's riding who did this.

So they voted Liberal because, they said, "At least these guys are going to have a referendum before they raise taxes." I just want to ask the Minister of Health, could he please explain to me why no referendum? Why won't he allow the people of Ontario the opportunity to pass judgment?

Some of them want to vote against the federal Liberals as a result, but I'm saying they'll bring in the referendum. They promised it. We'll convince them to change their minds. So will they tell us? I look forward to hearing the minister's explanation.

The Acting Speaker: The minister has two minutes to reply.

Hon Mr Smitherman: In direct response to my honourable friend, I want to say that for the first time there was some candour and honesty from that member in this House. He has just accepted the Peters report. In response to his acceptance of the Peters report, I demand to know from him, where's the $9,000? Where is the $9,000 that the law of Ontario dictates that every Tory cabinet minister who was involved in pulling the wool over the eyes of the people in the province of Ontario—where's the $9,000, John? Pay up, I say to the member from Nepean-Carleton. Where is the $9,000? The truth has shined through tonight in the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat. Please take your seat. Would the members quieten down? I can't even hear the Minister of Health.

Hon Mr Smitherman: What I'm pleased about is that after our relentless questioning of the member for Nepean-Carlton these long days, he's finally come clean with his constituents and acknowledged that he was the participant in a $5.6-billion cover-up, a $5.6 billion that grew.

When we got here and looked a little deeper into the closet, what else did we find, I say to the member from Nepean-Carleton, as we looked deeper? We found at least $721 million in the budgets of the hospitals of this province that, under a nudge and wink from Tony Clement—who was then a Tory MPP and cabinet minister and who is now running and pretending that he wasn't part of a gang that pulled a $5.6-billion spool of wool over the eyes of the people of Ontario.

Instead, we have a government that stands firm in its place, committed to the budget that we brought forward because it does what we promised. It does what we said we would do, which is to enhance the fundamental quality of public services in Ontario. What I look forward to in the next election, in October 2007, is the opportunity—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Your time is up.

Further debate on the budget bill?

Mr Baird: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the budget. I want to say to those people sitting at home in their living rooms that Rosario Marchese, the member for Trinity-Spadina, is up next and will be adding his thoughts to the budget. I am pleased, on behalf of constituents in Nepean-Carleton, to have the opportunity to rise and speak to this budget bill.

This budget bill is an odious piece of legislation. I have never seen such a public reaction to this budget bill. I have received e-mails, faxes, calls and visits in my constituency office. I've talked to people right across the riding in Barrhaven, Stittsville, Greely, Metcalfe, Manotick and North Gower. Frankly, they're just livid. They are angry and furious like I have never seen them before in all of my time here.

They may have disagreed on occasion with some of the measures the Harris government took but they said, "At least Harris was doing what he said he would do. He said he was going to tighten the belt and he did it. I'll tell you, he did what he said he would do and he restored some honour and some integrity to politics."

I want to talk about the fundamental centrepiece of this government. People are so concerned. There's a variety of promises that politicians make, but I don't think there's ever been a promise—Pierre Trudeau, our former Prime Minister, promised not to bring in wage and price controls and then did it. But he didn't bring in a piece of legislation saying he wouldn't, and then sign a pledge before election day promising not to. He didn't spend $4 million running TV ads looking into living rooms across the country saying that he wouldn't bring them in. This was probably the most black-and-white campaign commitment that was ever made before in Ontario history, and people in Ontario are angry. People in Nepean-Carleton are angry, and I'm supposed to be here to represent their views.

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Interjections.

Mr Baird: I can understand why these Liberal MPPs are angry, because they've been told by Andrew Steele exactly what to say. That's unfortunate, because I think they should be here to represent the people of the province who elected them.

I want to congratulate some members for having the courage to speak up. I have the latest Fiberal news release here. Constituency week provided an opportunity for many Liberal MPPs "to reflect on the political anthrax that the Liberals delivered in their May 18 budget. For many, the groundswell of pleas for mercy and the outrage that they heard from constituents was just too much. Despite strict central directives, some rookie and veteran Liberal MPPs told their local media how they really felt about the budget." I want to share with you some of these concerned Ontarians.

Marie Bountrogianni, my good friend the member for Hamilton Mountain and a minister in the government, said that she will be fighting to lower the premiums. I quote the Hamilton Spectator, May 26, page A1:

"She admitted she's hearing from angry constituents who say they cannot afford to pay premiums on a salary of $29,000, and hinted those premiums may be lowered.

"'I will be taking that message back to (Queen's Park),'" she said." Well, I hope Marie Bountrogianni is taking that message back to Queen's Park.

I also want to talk about my buddy, my friend Dave Levac, the member for Brant. I see some of his staff—

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the member again to please refer to other members of the House by their riding names.

Mr Baird: Dave—oh, sorry; the member for Brant, the Liberal whip, told chiropractors that he felt their pain and suggested that McGuinty should revisit the decision to slash these services.

Mr Marchese: Sympathetic pain, vicarious pain—what kind does he mean?

Mr Baird: Sympathetic pain; vicarious pain, perhaps. Perhaps he needed an adjustment—a visit to the chiropractor—but he can't afford to go now.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): He needs an attitude adjustment.

Mr Baird: "He needs an attitude adjustment," my friend from Halton says. But I want to read you what he says. Commenting on this decision, he said:

"'The irony is that I spoke to them just after returning from my regular appointment,'" blank "chuckled, 'so believe me, I understand their pain.'

"He said he didn't want to give any false hope, but added, 'Revisiting decisions is something we should always be prepared to discuss.'"

I want to congratulate the member for Brant because he's concerned about the two-tier health care the Liberals have brought in. He's concerned enough to say that no longer should you present your OHIP card when you visit this medical practitioner. Take out your Amex card—

Mr Marchese: Your Visa.

Mr Baird: —your Gold Visa, and pay with that. If you can't afford to, just go home. Don't see this medical practitioner. If you can't afford it, suffer.

Mr Chudleigh: Suck it up.

Mr Baird: "Suck it up," as the member for Halton says.

I also want to talk about the member for Niagara Falls, Kim Craitor, who demanded that McGuinty restore coverage for the health care services he slashed. I want to quote from the Niagara Falls Review, Tuesday, May 25:

"Craitor said he will lobby members of his own party and ask them to reverse that decision and restore the coverage."

I am very excited that the member for Niagara Falls is here.

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): On a point of order—

Mr Marchese: He's not in his seat.

Mr Baird: He's not in his seat.

I was so excited about that.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Did you mention Ernie Parsons?

Mr Baird: The member for Leeds-Grenville, who I know was out in his constituency working hard recently, said, "Talk about the member from Belleville." But I'm going to wait and see the transcript. In question period, I'm looking forward to the member for Oak Ridges coming in and tabling the transcript. I'm going to give the member from Belleville the benefit of the doubt, and boy, oh boy, will we see what that transcript says tomorrow.

Mr Craitor: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wanted to correct the record. As usual, the member on the other side—

Mr Marchese: You can't correct the record.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: It's not a point of order, but it's a point of information. Thank you.

I'll return to the member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr Baird: If you want to correct yourself, talk to the reporter at the Niagara Falls Review. This is what it says on page A3 in the Niagara Falls Review, Tuesday, May 25: "Craitor said he will lobby members of his own party and ask them to reverse that decision and restore the coverage." They can call John Baird names, but now he's attacking the good integrity of the staff at the Niagara Falls Review.

I've been to the peninsula. I want to move my way into eastern Ontario. Our newest member from eastern Ontario, Jim Brownell, said—

Interjection.

Mr Baird: Sorry, the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. I apologize, Speaker. He said:

"I am not happy with certain things in the budget. But it is a good budget. We had some difficult choices to make."

Potentially, he is going to vote for a bill he's not happy with. I would say that the constituents of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh want him to fight against this bill.

Mr Chudleigh: What about the ones with sore backs?

Mr Baird: What about the ones with sore backs? They can get out their Amex cards, because this is McGuinty two-tier health care. They won't take the OHIP card any more. They'll take the Amex card.

Mr Chudleigh: What if I don't have one?

Mr Baird: If you don't have an Amex card, you have to suffer.

Mr Chudleigh: Suck it up.

Mr Baird: Suck it up and suffer. That's what they say.

The member for Ottawa-Orléans called the budget "brutal." Those aren't my words.

Interjection: Who's this?

Mr Baird: The member for Ottawa-Orléans called this budget "brutal," and I congratulate the member for Ottawa-Orléans. "Ottawa-Orléans Liberal MPP Phil McNeely described the budget as 'brutal' but insisted the new tax was required to improve health care and education." That's the member for Ottawa-Orléans.

I'll tell you, these are mild compared to the constituents I'm hearing from. I think we're going to have to consider supplementary estimates for counselling for some of the constituency staff in these Liberal MPPs' offices. I feel their pain. They must be getting it all over the place. They must be getting it from their supporters. A real slap in the face.

Mr Marchese: Taking a beating.

Mr Baird: Taking a beating. We're going to have to consider supplementary estimates, I'm sure, to provide some help for these Liberal estimates.

I'm also pleased to announce in this House at the first opportunity: They're back. We've seen the re-emergence of that great group, Ontarians For Responsible Government. They are back. They were first born in the lean years of Bob Rae's government to try to fight big government, big taxes, big deficits, and they're back. They put an ad in the paper recently, and I want to read a little bit about their success:

"The National Citizens Coalition"—of course that's a group formerly headed up by our next Prime Minister, the Honourable Stephen Harper—"is resurrecting its project group, Ontarians For Responsible Government, to oppose the policies of Ontario Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty.

"'We set up ORG in the dark days of former Premier Bob Rae,' says NCC vice-president Gerry Nicholls. 'Back then ORG's tough ad campaigns helped to drive the NDP from office. Today we want to put the same kind of heat on the provincial Liberal government.'

"ORG's first shot is a full-page newspaper ad appearing today in the Toronto Sun."

I'll tell you, were Paul Martin's people angry about this. I want to read what it says. It has a big picture of our Premier with the headline, "Had it with Dalton's broken promises? Then send the Liberals a message." They tell folks where they can contact the Premier. We're really glad that Ontarians For Responsible Government has re-emerged to help fight this big-spending government.

Constituents right across Ontario—I had occasion to be in Kemptville, in the member for Leeds-Grenville's constituency, and I'll tell you, they were angry. A lot of young suburban families were talking to me and to Gord Brown, the next member of Parliament for Leeds-Grenville, about the pain they're feeling. Gord Brown will take that message to the House of Commons, finally, and talk about why health care should be a priority for this government.

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People say that the Liberals are just one party federally and provincially. I say no, no, the federal one is the one that cut health care by $25 billion; it's the provincial government that raised taxes. You have to differentiate them. In Ontario, all the Liberal MPPs of the day voted for the taxpayer protection pledge, and it makes raising taxes a crime. But, I'll tell you, people in Ontario know that while the Premier of Ontario is committing highway robbery, it is Paul Martin driving the getaway car. Paul Martin is an unindicted co-conspirator to this crime because he cut health care by $25 billion, and that's why we're dealing with this now. In the budget presented in the House federally there is not a single new dime for health care in Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: I say to the Minister of Community and Social Services, you should get on the Speaker's roster and join this debate.

This is the reality we are facing. Health care spending was cut by the feds. The former government cut it from $17 billion up to $28 billion. That's a health care cut: $11 billion. I see the Minister of Health stand in his place and talk about how, "Oh, we're going to put $65 million into that and $100 million into that." I don't trust them. People in Ontario don't trust you. I dare you to tell me the name of a single Liberal MP who says they agree with your budget. Can you name anyone seeking office in this federal election who agrees with this budget? I can tell you Réginald Bélair, from Timmins-James Bay, has come out against the budget, and many others.

People are asking why Paul Martin would have called a federal election when the aftermath of this budget is being felt, that he was surprised. We found out that he had a heads-up warning. The ever-vigilant member for Leeds-Greenville, our House leader, put out a press release today that I would like to read:

"Ontario Conservative House leader, Bob Runciman, MPP for Leeds-Grenville, today called on the Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty to step aside for breaching the oath of secrecy he took when he was sworn in as Premier. Runciman charged that McGuinty's public admission that he gave Prime Minister Martin advance notice of measures contained in the Ontario budget constituted a clear violation of the oath of allegiance for members of cabinet.

"'McGuinty not only violated parliamentary conventions surrounding budget secrecy, he broke his own sworn oath to respect cabinet secrecy,' fumed Runciman." And it takes a lot to get this guy angry. "'He's proven that not only is his signature worthless, but his sworn oath. He should resign!'" I agree with the member for Leeds-Greenville on that.

I want to talk about the health care provisions of the budget. The Ontario Hospital Association has come forward and has said that the increases for hospitals won't cover half of what inflation does. Inevitably, one of two things will happen: This government will be forced into coming to the table with additional funding to help fund the Queensway-Carleton Hospital, the Ottawa Hospital and other agencies because there is not enough money in the budget and the spending will go even higher; or they'll have to lay off hospital staff. They'll have to lay off health care workers. It's terrible.

I'll tell you there are constituents in my riding who are concerned about the challenges that will impose on our local hospitals. I thought the president of the Ontario Hospital Association in her post-budget comments was restrained, to say the least, but I can tell you they will not get away with it.

I say to the members opposite—Education: Where is the follow-up to the Rozanski report? Where is the follow-up to the investments that were recommended in Rozanski? These folks have put all of their money in a big gift-wrapped gift and sent it to the union bosses to solve their special interests.

I see the member for Ottawa Centre here. A friend of mine was downtown outside of the Sheraton hotel—

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): You don't have any friends.

Mr Baird: I say to the member for Windsor West, what happened to you when you went to your high school reunion? They booed her. She got booed in her own constituency. Let's hear it for the booing. I think that's terrible. I'm absolutely shocked. No wonder she got re-elected by the skin of her teeth, as she has in the last two elections. No wonder the Liberals lost those two seats federally in Windsor. I'll ask you, is that the case?

The member for Ottawa Centre—there were two taxpayers who were shoring up outside of the Sheraton—

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Conservatives.

Mr Baird: They're taxpayers. They were exercising their democratic right to protest. The member for Ottawa Centre walked by one gentleman and sneered at him. The gentleman was wearing a large pink costume. Then he actually gave a rude gesture to another Ontario taxpayer, as he walked in to hear the Minister of Finance give a speech. I can't show you the gesture. Maybe the member for Durham can, but I can't. The member for Durham possibly could. But he did that to a taxpayer, nonetheless. He pays your salary, I say to the member for Ottawa Centre. You work for him. I can't believe—giving your own constituent a rude gesture. I was absolutely shocked. It was reported back to me.

I did receive an e-mail from—

Interjections.

Mr Baird: The member for Ottawa Centre. I think that you're aware of the taxpayer who he made that rude gesture to.

I did hear from a taxpayer, a well-respected accountant. In the budget, there is a war of words going on in Ottawa between the Minister of Finance and Randall Denley of the Ottawa Citizen. Mr Denley has exposed the charade that is the $3.9-billion trick.

I want to take a moment to explain the $3.9-billion trick to taxpayers. The Liberal government of the late 1980s and the NDP government of the early 1990s signed

the privatization of the hydro system contracts with the private sector to buy electricity at eight cents a kilowatt hour, signed by—ministers in that government were named Sorbara and Phillips—

Mr Marchese: Bradley.

Mr Baird: —and Bradley.

Mr Runciman: And Patten.

Mr Baird: And Patten, and the NDP did more of them. There are 1,700 megawatts of this high-priced power that they paid for through the private sector. This liability was sitting with the Ontario government, so they were losing $250 million a year. They're now turning that over to the Ontario Energy Board and saying, "Let the consumers pay."

That's one issue. We can talk about whether that's a bad or a good idea. You promised in the election campaign not to raise hydro rates. But we'll put that aside.

There'll be $1.70 per month on the hydro bill to pay this off—the new McGuinty hydro tax, as my friend from Clarington calls it.

1940

They took this $3.9-billion liability, but because of accounting, they have to count it as revenue because it's debt off the books. I don't take any issue with counting it as revenue. But surely you would use that to pay off debt, and they haven't done it. This is like selling your house, going on a spending spree with the proceeds but not paying off the mortgage. It's going to catch up with you. It is an Enron-style trick, stunt. If you did this in the private sector, you would go to jail. It would be considered illegal. It would be considered corrupt. It would be considered scandalous. There would be a public inquiry in this country if anyone did that.

They put this $3.9 billion down as income, but how much is going into their pockets? Nothing, not a single billion of that $3.9 billion will ever show its place this fiscal year. It will take until 2048 to pay that off.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Will you still be here?

Mr Baird: I will still be here. So will the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. It will take the better part of 50 years to pay this off, but they're going to spend all the money this year. That is an utter disgrace. It's accounting. They could have counted it as revenue, and then there was no requirement to spend it.

I want to read from an e-mail I received from a very well-respected senior accountant in my constituency in Nepean-Carleton:

"I note with some concern (as shared by Randall Denley) the inclusion of $3.9 billion in the 2004-05 estimates. I am making some inquiries with my colleagues at the PSAB as to the appropriateness of this entry.

"Assuming the entry is appropriate, at issue may be the timing of the recognition of the $3.9 billion in the accounts."

Senior accountants are saying that this is a fudge-it budget. It is akin to embezzlement, I say to the member for Halton. I say that Randall Denley in the Citizen is not going to let this issue go away and I'm not going to let this issue go away. The Conservative caucus is not going to let this issue go away.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: The member for Trinity-Spadina will not let this issue go away. We are tremendously concerned about it.

I thought this budget had the fingerprints of McGuinty on it and the fingerprints of the Minister of Finance. I did not know that Paul Martin had a hand in writing this. The people say, "Oh, come on. Paul Martin didn't write this budget. The federal Liberals have nothing to do with this budget; this is the provincial budget." I learned that Paul Martin's campaign manager, David Herle, got a secret contract to help write and to help sell this budget. It is absolutely outrageous that Paul Martin's campaign manager got a contract to help write this budget.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: Go to your high school reunion and get booed again I say to the member for Windsor West.

Let's look at this: "Contract Given to Grit-Friendly Firm; Untendered Job 'Stinks to High Heaven'" say critics. Let me just quote, "Diane Flanagan, spokesman for Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, confirmed that the Liberal government never held a public tendering process for the contract that was ... given to David Herle's firm." They never did it. Paul Martin's right-hand man got an untendered contract to help write the budget. I hope we'll find out when that contract becomes available, and if they were doing communications work to sell this budget, there had better be a value-for-money audit, because I can tell you this has been the most poorly received budget in contemporary Canadian political history. People are outraged. I don't think there was as much anger when Floyd Laughren brought in his first budget.

But when the untendered contract issue came up they said, "No, he got a subcontract from someone who did get a tendered contract." I said, "Oh, that's a coincidence that someone who was a vendor of record, someone who is eligible for government contracts, just happened to hire Paul Martin's campaign manager to help with the budget." Then we found out, as it says here in Alan Findlay's article from the Toronto Sun, that Flanagan confirmed that the subcontracting idea came from the finance ministry itself. Which bureaucrat at the finance ministry said, "Let's go hire Paul Martin's campaign manager to help us sell this budget"? Give me a break. There's not a single bureaucrat who recommended hiring David Herle, Paul Martin's campaign manager; it was done by Dalton McGuinty directly, and that is absolutely outrageous.

Mr Yakabuski: Good judgment, eh?

Mr Baird: "Good judgment," the member for Barry's Bay says. Boy, oh boy. We used to say they had federal Liberal cousins; now we know that they share the same brain. Their headquarters on St Mary Street is actually co-located with these clowns up in Ottawa.

I am concerned. I was listening to this government's promise and commitment that federal-provincial relations would once again be harmonious, that they could get along with the federal government and that the federal

government could get along with them. We see this as the first instance in Canadian political history where the federal government is now running against the provincial government of the same party.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: You should go to the hustings, I say to the member for Peterborough, because a Conservative is going to get elected in Peterborough this federal election.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Do you want to bet that Peter Adams won't be re-elected?

Mr Baird: To the charity of your choice, I say to the member.

Mr Leal: Ten bucks, you're on.

Mr Baird: On the issue of betting, if he could talk to the member for Dundas on that same bet, because he owes me one from the by-election in Hamilton East and I'd like to settle on that.

I've also got money to put a friendly wager on Hamilton West, that the opposition will defeat the government there too. It will be most interesting.

They hired Paul Martin's campaign manager to write the budget—untendered contract. They won't tell us how much it is. At least Mike Harris would tell you how much these contracts cost. It was open, it was transparent and you could find out. But they're keeping it secret. The minister refuses to divulge it in this House. It's our money, and it's their friends.

I'll tell you, it took them about 10 seconds to get their friends lined up for contracts. We know that Peter Donolo was hired. Jean Chrétien—his left-hand man was John Manley. And John Manley—they say they put a tendered contract out and hired Jean Chrétien's right-hand man, Peter Donolo—

Interjection: When he was an MP.

Mr Baird: When he was an MP receiving two paycheques. Unbelievable.

We were told it would be different. We have to ask ourselves a question: Has a provincial budget ever brought down a federal government in Canadian political history before? I don't think so. Murray Campbell from the Globe and Mail said that Dalton McGuinty might accomplish something that no political leader in Canadian history has ever done: He could bring down two majority governments in one year.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: "In 15 minutes," he says.

We're tremendously concerned about that. Before Dalton McGuinty asked for more money from hard-working middle-class taxpayers, he should have gone to Ottawa and asked for an increase to the health care budget so that working families weren't pinched.

I brought it up in question period today. One of the many calls I received was from a single mother in Barrhaven who says she can't afford the $600. After she pays the rent; after she pays her hydro bill, which has gone up; after she pays her car insurance, which has gone up; after she visits the shopping mall; municipal taxes going up after Bob Chiarelli raised them—

Interjection.

Mr Baird: No, she doesn't pay municipal taxes, because she's a renter, but—

Interjection.

Mr Baird: It has an effect on her rent, you're right. She doesn't have the $600 to pay. I asked the Premier, "What is she to do?" All he could give me was a smug, arrogant answer, to talk about some former year and the fiscal situation under the former government. What is this woman to do?

I talked to a senior citizen on the telephone, who is 58 years old. Her husband has passed away. She's working part-time to supplement her survivor's benefits from her husband. She doesn't have the money to pay this extra premium.

I say to members opposite, what will be cut from the family's budget? Will one of their children not be able to play hockey? Will they have to downsize their home? Will they have to give up the luxury of cable television? Will they not be able to have Internet access at the family's home?

1950

For a family making $48,000 or $50,000, $600 may not seem like a lot of money to some of these limousine Liberals standing over there, but once a family has paid all their taxes, once they've paid for food and shelter, once they've paid for clothing their children and other expenses—gasoline that's sky-high, electricity bills that are going up by 20%, their car insurance—where are they going to get this money? It's the last $600, not the first. Don't you guys get that?

I actually don't know what to say to my constituents on this. They're going to go to their boss and get a $600 raise? I don't think that's going to happen. I don't think there's a single employer anywhere in the province that's just going to say, "Oh, no problem. We'll just pay it off."

This woman is also going to be hit when she goes to the optometrist. She's going to have to take out her credit card when she visits her doctor's office to pay for Dalton McGuinty's two-tier health care. I really don't know what to say to these people. You know what they said to me? They said, "You know what, John? We're not even going to bother voting any more; it doesn't matter. You politicians are all the same, and you don't keep your promises." Dalton McGuinty has driven them over the edge. They don't care about politics and government any more. And you talk about the democratic deficit. You come in here today with the minister of democratic renewal. When we see cynicism of this level it just makes me nod my head.

Mr Chudleigh: Democratic destruction.

Mr Baird: Democratic destruction, the member says.

What I can't understand is this. The government announced, as part of its financial policies—they ran on promising two things. One, they weren't going to raise your taxes, and two, they were going to get rid of the Mike Harris corporate tax cuts. But this budget does the exact opposite. This budget raises taxes on working families, families who just don't have another $600 or

$900 to give collectively, for them and their spouse, and it actually cuts taxes on corporations.

I agree with a plan to eliminate the capital tax. It is a job-destroying tax. Frankly, I congratulate the Liberals for cutting corporate taxes. They're too high, and it's wrong. I congratulate them for doing that. But what do I say to the single mother in Barrhaven or to this 58-year-old widow who's working part-time to supplement her survivor's pension when she's paying more and the Royal Bank is paying less? This violates everything that this gang ran on. They eliminate corporate tax cuts in December, and then they bring them back in the spring. We just don't know what to expect next from you people.

When the Minister of Health was speaking about all the increased health procedures, my constituents didn't believe them. Whether it's the nurse at the hospital, the retired businessman who serves on the hospital board or someone wanting home care for their mom, they don't believe them. They don't believe anything this government says.

We saw something remarkable this week. We saw the Prime Minister of Canada get a question from a student in Saskatoon about this government, which is unbelievable. I promised my constituents in Nepean-Carlton—and for two of them I've had the opportunity to raise their issue—that we will do everything legislatively to slow down and stop this tax increase, to stop these broken promises. To do that, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1955 to 2025.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 7; the nays are 31.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost and now return again to the member for Nepean-Carlton.

Mr Baird: I'm disappointed. I always support your procedural motions. I'm surprised. So I'm going to continue on my budget speech on this bill.

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): You couldn't go for a whole hour?

Mr Baird: That's good.

People say that the Liberals promised not to raise taxes. Of course, the centrepiece of this bill is what I've called a declaration of war against the middle class. For Liberal candidates in Ontario in the federal election, and for Paul Martin, it's proved to be a weapon of mass political destruction. They can't find a single Liberal candidate in—David McGuinty's going around Ottawa South saying he's never met Dalton. That's how bad this is.

Mr Bisson: "I'm not my brother," he said.

Mr Baird: "I'm not my brother," he said. That's right. He's never met him. I've woken them up a bit.

Let's take a fiscal journey by the Liberal Party in a series of quotes. Let's look at Liberal finance critic Gerry Phillips at the standing committee on estimates, June 4th, 2003.

Mr Chudleigh: I was there.

Mr Baird: The member for Halton, as usual, was working hard and was there.

Let's see what Gerry Phillips said: "I therefore take it that there is a $5-billion risk in the budget." This was Dalton McGuinty's senior finance man. His left brain, for goodness' sake. Let's look at what Dalton McGuinty said on September 11, 2003: "We're also saying that should the need arise, we will slow down the rate at which we go ahead with our promises, but we will not raise taxes and we will certainly not run a deficit." This was Dalton McGuinty. Anticipating a deficit, he said that. Unbelievable.

Coming back to the race in Ottawa South federally, I was in the Tim Hortons at Alta Vista and Bank Street. There was a woman standing in front of me. She hadn't even turned around to see I was standing behind her. She was complaining viciously and saying very unparliamentary things about the Premier—in the heart of his own constituency.

Do you know what the children used to say in Ottawa South? Twenty years ago there was that movie, ET. They used to say, "ET, go home." David McGuinty says, "Dalton, don't come home." David doesn't want Dalton to come home. Dalton, if you're watching, David doesn't want you to come home. He doesn't want you to show your face in Ottawa. Shameful.

2030

Anyway, I'm going to continue the fiscal journey of the Liberal Party. We've already said that the Liberal finance critic, Gerry Phillips, said there was a $5-billion risk to the budget. We've already said that Dalton McGuinty promised not only to not to run a deficit but that—I'll read it again: "We're also saying that should the need arise, we will slow down the rate at which we go ahead with our promises."

Ten billion dollars in spending increases in one year and you say you've done it? Give me a break.

Let's look at what happened on September 22. A report by the Fraser Institute in the middle of the election campaign says: "Fraser Alert....State of emergency: Ontario's potential $4.5-billion deficit."

What did Dalton say? The next day Dalton went on the leaders' debate and said, "I won't raise taxes by a single cent for Ontario families." That's what Dalton McGuinty said.

Let's look at some more here. Focus Ontario, Graham Richardson, November 1. What did the Premier say? "One of those broad parameters is that we will not be raising taxes. Families are carrying enough of a burden as it is." That's after Erik Peters's report. After Erik Peters's report, he still recommitted to promising not to raise taxes.

Hon Ms Pupatello: Stop yelling. It's not effective any more.

Mr Baird: I say to the member for Windsor West, go and get booed at your high school reunion again.

People say, "Well, that was last year." Let's look at what Dalton McGuinty said in January. "Question: 'When you say that everything is on the table, does that include tax increases?'" Dalton for once answered the question. He said, "No. No, I won't raise taxes."

What did he say? People are interested, and I say you should go home and go to your riding. You should go door-knocking in your constituency with your federal Liberal candidate and find out what people are saying. And wear a button that says "I love Dalton McGuinty and I love this budget" and you'll find out what they think of you. I say you need to be—

Interjection.

Mr Baird: What riding are you?

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Mississauga West.

Hon Ms Pupatello: John, don't be insulting.

Mr Baird: I know he's from Mississauga. There are a lot of ridings in Mississauga. I'm from Ottawa, the other end of the province. He's a new member. I want to know; I'm asking. He should go out and talk to people in his riding.

I was in Mississauga the other day. A thousand people were out to support Parvinder Sandhu in his election race and to support Nina Tangri in hers.

He said no to tax increases on January 14. Greg Sorbara was quoted in the Toronto Star, the National Post and the Ottawa Citizen: "We said during the campaign that we're not going to raise personal income taxes, and we're going to be true to our word on that."

Look on your pay stub in July. It will say "Personal income tax," and your health care premium will be collected on that line. That's what this budget bill says. That's what this budget bill says. The tax rate—

Mr Delaney: Personal income tax is the same.

Mr Baird: Tell that to my constituent who has to pay $600 extra and doesn't have the money, that that's the same. Tell that to my constituent who's going to have to tell her son that he can't take hockey this coming year because they don't have the money to do it. It's not funny at all. Let's look at what Dalton McGuinty said.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask all members of this House to respect the decorum that I would require. I would like to again recognize the member for Nepean-Carleton.

Interjections.

Mr Baird: Talking about laughing at people, I had a good friend of mine who was at the Toronto Island Airport—

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Name names.

Mr Baird: I'm not going to name the minister who this happened to. You can hear the story out, I say to the minister opposite. It wasn't David Caplan, the Minister of Infrastructure, I'll tell him that.

But I had a friend who said to me that she was at the Toronto Island Airport, standing waiting for the ferry, and a minister and his staff walked up. Some woman drove up in a beat-up old car and proceeded to empty the car of a lot of plastic bags which she was carrying on her trip, and after she made her way past these groups, they laughed at her. It was a Liberal minister and his staff who laughed at her. I thought that was disgraceful and I wanted to put that on the record. I'll be faxing it to the said minister's office so they'll know about that.

And I'll say it isn't my friend the Minister of the Environment, because she wouldn't do that. I should put on the record that I have two serious issues in my constituency, and the Minister of the Environment and her staff have been very helpful on those issues, so I want to publicly acknowledge that. She has been very helpful and her staff have been very attentive. She is actually sending two of her staff down to meet with some concerned residents, and I want to put that on the record. I appreciate that.

Mr Bisson: That's very good.

Mr Baird: The member for Timmins-James Bay says that's good. I helped the member for Timmins-James Bay when I was minister of francophone affairs and he actually wrote about it in the paper. I think we should do that.

Hon Ms Pupatello: Don't forget when I helped you when you were minister.

Mr Baird: I will acknowledge that Sandra Pupatello—sorry, the member for Windsor West did help me when I was a minister. I will acknowledge that. And I helped her and I helped Windsor.

Let's look at what Dalton McGuinty said on Focus Ontario on April 24. "Well, what we said all along—and I'm very clear about this"—he interrupted what he said and said, "I'm very clear about this"—"is that we're not going to be raising taxes." April 24: That's five weeks ago. He promised Graham Richardson, and through Graham Richardson the people of Ontario, that he would not raise taxes.

Mr Delaney: Your personal tax rate is the same.

Mr Baird: My personal tax rate isn't the same. I've got your budget on page 9, and I'll tell you, I am paying $750 more. That's $750 that's gone. I'll tell you that the single mother in my riding is going to be losing $600. That's not the first $600, it's the last $600, so she's got to decide what to do. Is she going to get rid of cable television? Is she going to get rid of expenses for the kids like one of them being able to take hockey as they did last year? Is she going to be able to provide a decent Christmas for her kids? That's what they're going to have to consider.

You should think and ask yourself how someone—whether it's at $48,000 or the single mother in Barrhaven in my constituency—is going to deal with it. It's incredibly serious. What about that 58-year-old widow, a senior, who is working part-time, which she never did

before, to help supplement her late husband's survivor benefits? Where is she going to get the money?

Interjection.

Mr Baird: I'll talk about welfare people. When I was the minister, welfare people had better spending power than they had when you were there, I'll tell you. They had a hand up.

One of the things that has not been said is that since the Liberal government took over, the welfare rolls are up by 11,000—11,000 more people on welfare. More people since you took over. Those are the facts.

Hon Ms Pupatello: Don't you dare lie in this House. That is crap.

Mr Baird: Those are the absolute facts. She said something unparliamentary, Speaker. I would like you to ask her to—

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the House to come to order. Would the Minister of Community and Social Services choose to withdraw her unparliamentary statement that she just made?

Hon Ms Pupatello: Yes, Speaker. I'd be happy to withdraw if the minister would hold to the facts. I'm happy—

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the Minister of Community and Social Services to withdraw her unparliamentary—

Hon Ms Pupatello: I withdraw my remarks, Speaker. You will tell the truth.

The Acting Speaker: I return to the member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr Baird: There are more people on welfare since you took over. Check your ministry's Web site. Or maybe they're not telling her. There are 11,000 more people on social assistance. Less hope, less opportunity for the future.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would once again ask the House to come to order.

Hon Ms Pupatello: Check your own stats, John.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr Baird: Since Dalton McGuinty became Premier, we have 11,000 more people who can't find a job and who are on welfare. They're getting no help and no assistance from this Premier and this minister. They have no plan to help move people from welfare to work, no new policies, no initiatives. They have talked against Ontario Works. They've talked against work for welfare. They've talked against putting the hand up. They've given the green light to fraud artists to come and rip off the system and go back on welfare. It's outrageous: 11,000 new people on welfare since the Liberal government took over.

How big is Prescott, I say to the member for Leeds-Grenville?

Mr Runciman: It's 5,000.

Mr Baird: How big is Kemptville?

Mr Runciman: Oh, 10,000.

Mr Baird: That's almost the size of Kemptville.

I think people who are convicted of criminal offences under the federal Criminal Code should go to jail. That's my policy.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: All I know is, there are 11,000 more people on welfare, and the spending power when I was minister was greater. People had greater spending power.

Interjections.

2040

The Acting Speaker: Once again, I ask the House to come to order, please.

Mr Baird: There are 11,000 more people on welfare because the member for Windsor West has no policy to get them back to work. I say to the member for Thunder Bay, he has no policies to get people back to work. We offered people the dignity of a job, the helpful hand up, work, training opportunities, experience, the dignity that comes with being able to make a contribution in your community, the simple things about getting a recommendation letter. This government offers them nothing. They made two changes: (1) They said, if you cheat the system for $450,000, you're allowed back on welfare immediately, as that celebrated case was in the paper; and (2) 11,000 more of them are on welfare.

The spending power of a welfare recipient was higher when I was minister than it has been since Dalton McGuinty became Premier. That is the honest truth. People could buy more when I was minister than since this Liberal government took over. And the truth hurts. Did they end the clawback? I looked in the budget bill for where they end the clawback of the national child benefit. They're not doing it. They used to say Mike Harris was the grinch when he did that. But no, they're not doing it. They're still going to claw that money back.

That's a testament to our welfare policies, which saw more than 600,000 people realize the dignity of a job, leave the rolls, move from welfare to work. I know they're still keeping the work-for-welfare policies in place. They didn't want to debate it in the election campaign because they didn't have the guts to debate it during the election campaign. They didn't have the guts to take on any welfare policy over there.

Let's look again at what Greg Sorbara said. He said on May 12, in the Toronto Sun, "I think on other occasions I have said that we are not going to be adjusting the rate of personal income tax in this province." I ask people to check their paycheques in July on the personal income tax line.

Mr Bisson: Where is it, John?

Mr Baird: I say to the members of the NDP, these guys, these folks over here, are taking a big cut this year. We're all taking a pay freeze, but the NDP members, the only members who don't want a pay hike, are all getting pay hikes this month.

Mr Bisson: Where? Where?

Mr Baird: They're all getting pay hikes this month. Howard's getting his car and driver back. Shelley won't have to drive any more. Maybe that's good.

Mr Bisson: That may well be a good thing. Come on.

Mr Baird: Maybe that's a good thing.

I want to express the huge frustration of people in my constituency—

Mr Patten: That's sexist.

Mr Baird: That's sexist? Shelley told me she had to drive Howard. So I say to the member opposite, that's an unfortunate comment and it is regrettable that he made it.

Let's look at the Toronto Star. That's the paper, with the big blue banner on the front, that used to be the friend of the Liberals. They quote Frank Graves: "It may well have been the most poorly received budget in contemporary political history in Canada." I can remember when Allan MacEachen presented his budget in 1981. He had to withdraw it, it was so bad. He had to withdraw it. A very smart, hard-working member informed me of that recently. Maybe this Liberal government will have to do it.

I also want, if I could, to pay tribute to Linda Leatherdale. Linda Leatherdale is the best friend a taxpayer has in the GTA. One of the columns she wrote last week says, "They Stabbed Us in the Back: Linda Leatherdale is fighting mad that the poor working Joe will pay much more and get a lot less for his health care dollar."

I can tell you that Linda Leatherdale is speaking for hundreds of thousands and even millions of hard-working middle-class families in Ontario and she is not going to back down. She is going to continue to struggle and fight to ensure there's some justice. We're pleased with that. I want to say to Linda Leatherdale that she's got the full support of the Conservative caucus in her tax-fighting campaign, because we are here to stand up for working families in Ontario, so we will be standing up for Linda.

I'll say this to conclude. You go right around the province and I don't know of a single member of the public who feels that they can trust the Premier. I don't know a single member of the public who feels that they can trust the Minister of Finance or that they can trust this government.

They promised to have a referendum on this issue. They're not living up to their promise. I'll tell you, we're going to have a referendum on this issue. It's going to happen on June 28. On June 28, the people of Ontario can go out and vote for a Conservative candidate, be it Gord Brown in Leeds-Grenville, Patrick Brown in Barrie, Michael Chong in Halton, John Capobianco in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, where the next Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, is tonight while we're holding down the fort here, so we're pleased with that. David Tilson, the soon-to-be-member for Dufferin-Caledon, David Turnbull, Dave Johnson in the Don Valley, will be there to fight for taxpayers federally.

Good for them for standing up and fighting for taxpayers. I say on behalf of the residents of Nepean-Carleton, your fight is our fight. We will continue to fight this.

Mr Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

Those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2048 to 2118.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing while you're counted. Take your seats.

All those opposed to Mr Baird's motion will please rise and remain standing while you're counted.

Clerk of the House: The ayes are five; the nays are 26.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

I recognize the member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr Baird: I don't want anyone to be left with the impression that the member for Trinity-Spadina wanted to work more. He voted against evening sittings, and I of course supported the government on these routine motions, as I regularly do, trying to be bipartisan and co-operative to try to assist the government of the day with their agenda.

I remember Dalton McGuinty—sorry; the Premier—made a solemn promise that we will have province-wide hearings on important pieces of legislation. I look forward to having hearings. I want to invite the committee to come to Ottawa and hear the concerns of my constituents and the member for Ottawa Centre's constituents. I want to invite them to Brockville, Midland, Orillia, Pembroke and Clarington, because this budget is bad public policy and you can make a difference by voting against it.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Marchese: First of all, I want to say that I really wanted to speak tonight. It's 9:30. Twenty minutes is all I'm asking, and we didn't get that chance. That was my only regret.

I do want to praise John Baird's speech, the member for Nepean-Carleton. It was a good speech, I thought, generally. And it's so nice to see John with the NDP, working together, fighting for the poor, fighting for the disenfranchised, fighting for seniors. It's just so beautiful to see. It's amazing what opposition can do. Repent, sinners. We're working together. John, isn't it interesting—John, I'm talking to you—that this budget measure that the Liberals have taken is something that even the Tories would not have contemplated? Isn't that interesting?

Mr Baird: True.

Mr Marchese: I hear it said, and I don't really know, that some Liberal MPPs are afraid to go and canvass. I hear it said; I don't know. I don't believe they're frightened to go and defend this budget, because Mr Sorbara, the Minister of Finance, is proud of this budget; Dalton McGuinty, the Premier, is proud of this budget. Although some people say the MPPs are frightened to go out and canvass, I don't believe that. I am sure they're out there knocking on them doors, defending this budget, because there are nuggets in this budget that people do

not know about and they need to go out and defend it. If it's untrue that you're not canvassing, tell them. You've got a great budget here. Go and defend it. John, you have to help them out, please.

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): The member for Nepean-Carleton had many tragic stories about this budget that are taking place in his constituency. Let me tell you about the tragic story that happened in my riding and that was caused by that government, that previous government that did not add one cent to mental health. We're adding $65 million this year and another $25 million for children's mental health.

Interjections.

Mr Fonseca: Two months ago, member for Nepean-Carleton, tragedy happened in my riding. An individual was stabbed to death in my riding two months ago because of a young man who's a schizophrenic who has not gotten any help in eight years, and he did stab somebody to death in my riding. Shame on you.

His mother and father were in my office, crying, saying the system had let them down. The system had let them down because they had been in hospital, and after 48 hours their son was let out of hospital. What did they say to them? "Your son would actually have to cause bodily harm to someone else or to himself to be able to get a bed in a mental health institution."

Now their son is at the Queen Street mental health institution, and this will cost our system millions of dollars. Because that government did not provide the social services to their son, they have brought tragedy upon this family and they have cost the taxpayers of this province, by not being preventive, millions of dollars. Shame on that government for letting this province down. Shame on you.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I really must stand and put on the record that there is an outstanding crowd here tonight, and I think it's out of respect for the member from Nepean-Carleton, obviously a future leader, either provincially or federally. He did hold you to account. In fact, most of the ministers he cited have left. I think the reason they left is because he touched on the truth, which is strange for them.

If you listen to the debate, the broken promises and all the other terms that have been used—I'm looking at several letters I've received, but I'm just going to read this: "I therefore take it that there is about a $5-billion risk in the budget." This was said by Gerry Phillips at the standing committee in June 2003.

Here's another one, by Dalton McGuinty, on September 11, 2003: "We're also saying that should the need arise, we will slow down the rate at which we go ahead with our promises, but we will not raise taxes and we will certainly not run a deficit."

So the cynicism has been struck here today. They certainly don't want the truth on the record. It's my understanding that Dalton promised—he disappointed the people, not just in the riding of Durham, but the member from Nepean-Carleton has touched on it with living examples of his constituents who simply can't pay the new health tax. These are the real people, the hard-working people of Ontario whom we're elected to represent—perhaps the people to whom you never explained your platform, and now you've actually disappointed them.

The member from Leeds-Grenville today made the most passionate plea, I think, did a press release on it and actually cornered the Premier. I'm sure the Premier is offended and hurt by it, because it's the truth. He put his hand on the Bible—it's sort of like those ads: "I promise not to raise your taxes." You can't trust them.

Mr McNeely: I'd like to get around again to those new debts the province got in the last eight years: schools, $8 billion; roads, $4 billion; bridges, $3 billion; energy—that was that former minister there—$10 billion, and no new production in the last few years. The total is $25 billion. This backlog is probably higher than $25 billion. This is typical, whether it's health care, education, energy or transportation, they saved money for eight years and left a mess in this province: a mess in crumbling schools, crumbling bridges, potholed roads and, worst of all, a $32-billion debt on hydro, plus no new investment in infrastructure there for two years.

We have a tough budget, and it will impact Ontarians. But we are cleaning up after a demolition crew that was making decisions for eight years in this province left us a social deficit, a service deficit and an infrastructure deficit, plus $6.2 billion in 2003. This is maintenance not done. It's $25 billion. It's the same as debt. It may be worse, because if you don't do your maintenance, your costs escalate.

Therefore, after eight years of Tory government we have added $21 billion to the debt in the 1990s, $6 billion in debt in 2003 and an equivalent debt of $25 billion because of neglecting our infrastructure, for a grand total of $52 billion in eight years. You can lower the taxes, but if you don't pay your bills, they come back to haunt you, and that's where we are—and they conned Ontarians into thinking they were good managers.

Revenues must equal expenses, and our tough budget and our four-year plan will put Ontario back into condition, especially with the programs announced by the Prime Minister recently: sharing the gas tax, forgiving the GST and the major infrastructure announcement. The federal-provincial-municipal team will bring back the public infrastructure so essential to our quality of life in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Nepean-Carleton has two minutes to reply.

Mr Baird: I want to thank the member for Durham for his usual wisdom. We've come to expect that. I want to thank the member for Trinity-Spadina. The member for Trinity-Spadina has never stood in his place and congratulated me on a speech in the eight years I've been here, except for tonight, and I'm pleased.

Mr Marchese: I always do that.

Mr Baird: I say to the member for Trinity-Spadina: You're the inspiration. He is the most eloquent member of the House

My friend the member for Ottawa-Orléans said no new energy plants were built in Ontario. He should go to Windsor and look at the Brighton Beach plant: 500 megawatts. He should go to Sarnia and look at the new TransAlta facility: 500 megawatts. He should go to Bruce county and see the 1,500 megawatts of new power. He should go to Durham and see the 500 megawatts. He should look at Huron Wind, the first commercial wind energy company in the province. There are lots of new energy plants. The member should speak to what he knows.

Interjections.

Mr Baird: I say to the Minister of Public Infrastructure: You never had to bring your credit card to a chiropractor or to an optometrist when we were in government. You never had to bring your Amex card to a health care facility.

To the member for Mississauga East, I thank him for his intervention in the debate. When Jack Layton went after Prime Minister Paul Martin with respect to homelessness, I thought it was regrettable and unfortunate, and I think your comments are in that same regard.

I want to wait for the opportunity that Ontarians will have to cast their ballot in this referendum on June 28—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the government members not to count down. That's showing profound disrespect for the House. I will allow the member for Nepean-Carleton to conclude his remarks.

Mr Baird: Thank you, Speaker. I can't believe the members opposite are showing disrespect like that. I'm truly shocked.

Members will have the opportunity on June 28 to cast their ballot. They will have their opportunity on June 28 to choose change by electing Stephen Harper as the next Prime Minister.

The Acting Speaker: It being past 9:30, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.

The House adjourned at 2131.

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Mercredi 2 juin 2004

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 2 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 2 juin 2004

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LACHLAN MONTAGUE

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): The best part of my job is meeting the most remarkable people living in Cambridge, North Dumfries and South Kitchener. Lachlan Montague is one of those remarkable people, even though he is a young man of 14. Recently, he served as one of our legislative pages. Lachlan lives with his parents, Margaret and Stephen, and his younger brother, Coulter. Lachlan attends the Temple Baptist Christian Academy in Cambridge, which has sponsored no less than three pages to our Legislature in the past five years.

While many of us at the age of 6, including me, concentrated on childhood playing, Lachlan had already developed a social conscience and was concerned with the well-being of the less fortunate, including homeless families. But recognition of the need by itself is not sufficient without action, and Lachlan devised an inventive program called Kans For Kids. At Halloween for the past eight years, Lachlan, his friends and many supporters have gone door to door to ask for canned goods for the homeless, rather than the usual candy. Last year, the program collected 4,000 pounds of food for the Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank.

I pay tribute to Lachlan, his family and the Temple Baptist Christian Academy in Cambridge for a job well done.

AIR QUALITY

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I would like to ask for unanimous consent to use this bicycle helmet as a prop. It's Environment Week. Can I have that?

The Speaker: The member for Toronto-Danforth has asked for unanimous consent to wear her helmet as a prop. I presume the member's only asking for herself to wear it at this time? Do I have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Ms Churley: This is probably a first in the Legislature, but I'm wearing this hat as a symbol. What with all the attention being paid to the unpopular Liberal budget and the federal election going on, what we have failed to notice here is that it's Environment Week in Canada. I wear this helmet as a symbol today. I rode my bike to work in the rain. How many here—put your hands up—either walked, took public transportation or bicycled to work today? Hey, I won't do the negative, but look, that's not bad at all.

It is Environment Week in Canada and it's a good opportunity for us to review where we're at in terms of the environment and air pollution, because this is Clean Air Day. I want to point out that later this afternoon we will be going through clause-by-clause on the government's greenbelt legislation, and I'm shocked to see—I've been waiting anxiously for the Liberal amendments to this greenbelt—guess what? Their amendments actually put more loopholes into the bill.

But what's worse, and why this relates to this being Environment Week, is that there is no amendment in there to deal with one of the biggest problems within this legislation, and that is what's called "leapfrog development." If that development goes ahead, that means we will have even more urban sprawl and people will be living further out. There will be more highways, more cars on the road, which will lead to more smog and bad air.

Happy Environment Week, everybody.

ITALIAN NATIONAL DAY

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): Oh, that's a hard one to follow, Mr Speaker.

On a much more serious note, today it gives me great pleasure to commemorate the anniversary of Italy's Independence Day, a milestone event which took place on June 2, 1946.

Italians throughout the world have joined Italy today in celebrating their national day. We recognize the contribution made by 1.5 million Italo-Canadians residing in our great land; 780,000 of those have chosen to make Ontario their home.

While Italy and Italians take pride in celebrating their national day, they are also proud to be known for their hospitality, flair, cutting-edge design and fabulous cuisine. Let us not forget, however, the many waves of Italian immigrants of early days who sacrificed their lives to build into the foundation of their newly discovered land of opportunity, which we call Canada.

From the first railway workers of the 1800s to the latter-day giant developers, professionals from every field, scientists, artists, restaurateurs, and many of my colleagues who today occupy seats in the Ontario Legis-

lature, Italians have left their distinct hallmark in every riding of our province.

Italians have always been, and are, grateful to Canada, a land that has allowed them to reach for and fulfill their desires and dreams, yet still being able to preserve their passion and zest for life that so distinguishes the Italian culture and tradition.

I know every member of the House wishes the Italian embassy and consular offices in Canada and the people of Italy congratulations. *[Remarks in Italian.]*

AIR QUALITY

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): As we recognize Clean Air Day today, I bring your attention to the fact that actions speak louder than words.

Last week, I had the opportunity to see the results of our Conservative government's $250-million investment into emission reduction technology at OPG Nanticoke. Meanwhile, the current government continues to point fingers at its favourite pollution scapegoat—coal—threatening coal fire closure while ignoring vehicle emissions, the source of 60% of Ontario's domestically produced smog problem. Apparently, with their stated intention to drop Drive Clean in favour of dirty clean, the Liberals' smoke-free Ontario does not apply to exhaust pipes.

Our government's investment at Nanticoke and Lambton will see nitrogen oxide emissions drop by 12,000 tonnes a year. That's the equivalent of taking 600,000 cars off the road. That's because selective catalytic reduction units, SCRs, are reducing nitrogen oxide emissions by 80% to those units to which they're attached.

The implementation of SCR technology builds on investments of $1.8 billion in fossil fuel air emission reduction since 1984. Results are clear: In 2000, fossil plants produced 14% more electricity than they did in 1984, but with 60% fewer acid gas emissions.

At Nanticoke specifically, sulphur dioxide levels have dropped by 60% and nitrogen oxide levels by 50%. It will continue to drop with the new SCR technology.

1340

SENIORS' MONTH

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm very pleased to rise today in recognition of Seniors' Month and to share with this Legislature some of the events and programs that will be held in Etobicoke-Lakeshore during this important month.

On June 4, my office will be having another safe medication seminar, this time with the added component of a medication use review. I would like to extend personal thanks to the Ontario Pharmacists' Association for developing this seminar and working with my office to make sure this ever-popular event continues.

Later in the month, my office will be providing a workshop on the ABCs of fraud that will help protect seniors from dishonest business practices that unfortunately target them.

On June 6, I will be honoured to participate in ceremonies to recognize the 60th anniversary of D-Day, both at Second Street Public School and here at Queen's Park. One of my constituents, Bruce Melanson, was one of 15,000 Canadians who landed on Juno Beach in a bold move to liberate Europe. Bruce travelled overseas with the First Division of the West Nova Scotia Regiment in May 1940, and went on to Juno Beach with the 3rd Division Light ack-ack. He will be attending the ceremonies in France with the Queen and our Prime Minister. I would like to add a personal thank you to Bruce for tirelessly advocating on behalf of veterans since the war.

I hope all of our colleagues will take the time on D-Day anniversary to participate in local ceremonies commemorating those who paid for our present freedoms with their brave efforts, and many with the ultimate sacrifice of their lives.

PREMIER OF ONTARIO

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Heaven help us, he's at it again. This morning, when working class families put their radios on, they heard that voice, once again, of Dalton McGuinty whispering sweet promises into their ears. I can only imagine how many radios were abruptly shut off; how many curses, not meant to be heard by children's ears, were thrown at the radio; and I hope not, but how many cars dangerously swerved off highways as they scrambled to turn off that voice.

"That's him. That's him," the taxpayers say, "the guy who is raising our taxes by over $1,200 a family. That's him. That's the voice of the man who's making grandma pay for her chiropractic care out of her own pocket. That's the man who's broken his word so many times he's making Richard Nixon look honest in comparison."

This morning, that voice, all over again; this is the man, Dalton McGuinty's voice, who is going to damage so many ears. The poor listeners, they're going to long for the less abrasive sounds of Wolfman Jack. You know we've heard that voice on the radio before. We heard those promises. "I'm not going to raise your taxes." We hear every morning, on the Bill Carroll show on CFRB, "Middle-class families will not see their taxes go up by one penny." I say, on behalf of the listeners on the radio this morning, Dalton McGuinty, we don't believe a word you say any more.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): Yesterday in this Legislature, in a question to the Premier, the member for Oak Ridges accused me of a number of things. He noted that while on an open-line phone show in Belleville—and as an aside, the radio has asked that it be corrected that their call letters are CJBQ, not CJBO—he accused me of indicating to the callers that I would bring their concerns regarding the budget to Queen's Park.

Indeed, as an individual with only one eye, I did express concern about the delisting of optometrists. I

plead guilty to that. I will never apologize for being the voice of my constituents in Queen's Park. I believe Premier McGuinty expects nothing less of our caucus.

The member for Oak Ridges, in his supplementary question, stated, "Certainly Mr Parsons said there will be public meetings and that he will personally undertake in those public hearings to oppose those measures." At that point, I indicated it was not true.

I have subsequently had the opportunity to review the tape of the CJBQ phone-in show. I am pleased to report that I did not in fact make that or any similar statement. I look forward to the member for Oak Ridges acknowledging this and, as a colleague, recommend that he be absolutely confident of the reliability of the information supplied by outside sources.

I am very aware of the legislative process and would not have made that statement, recognizing that members do not in fact appear before a committee hearing. I strongly support the openness of our government, however, and encourage members of the public to make presentations during the committee phase of the budget bill or any other bill.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): This week we commemorate the sacrifices of the generation who won World War II. They've passed the torch to our generation of baby boomers, who will begin to turn 60 in the next few years.

Ontario's government has looked at the needs of an aging population and responded with a budget that addresses those needs. Our first priority for this generation and the next generation of seniors is to ensure access to health care in Ontario. That's why every cent from Ontario's health care premium will be invested in health care.

Healthier seniors mean a growing need for home care and long-term-care programs and facilities. Ontario's budget will help our hospitals free resources from some chronic care patients who might better live and receive treatments in their homes or in long-term-care facilities.

Ontario has responded to today's and tomorrow's seniors with funding for more doctors, more nurses and the ability to provide cardiac procedures, joint replacements, cataract surgeries and MRI or CT scans.

Change in health care in Ontario means that Ontario will see family health teams, better primary care, home care for an additional 95,700 Ontarians by 2007-08, and compassionate end-of-life care for another 6,000 Ontarians.

RED MAPLE READING PROGRAM

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I rise today to speak about a great program in one of the rural schools in the riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. Maple Ridge Public School in Dundas county strives to prepare their students for the challenges they will face in high school. A dedicated staff and high participation of parents allow this school to strive for success.

A distinguishing factor of Maple Ridge is their students' participation in the Red Maple reading program, which is sponsored by the Ontario Library Association. The Red Maple program is offered to youth in grades 7, 8 and 9, where students choose to read a list of 10 outstanding Canadian adult fiction titles. The students must read at least five of the 10 in order to vote for their favourite book, and the voting takes place in late April.

This is an extracurricular program at Maple Ridge and is above and beyond classroom expectations. Thirty-four of Maple Ridge's grade 7 and 8 students read five or more of the 10 novels selected. Four students read all 10 novels within two months: Erin Armstrong, Stephanie Coyne, Hayley Warren and Mike Scheuner deserve congratulations.

As a retired educator, I am proud to be a part of a government that respects and strives for excellence in education. Our 2004 budget, coupled with the recent education funding announcements, will ensure that rural schools will be able to continue to operate at an accelerated level, and programs such as the Red Maple reading program will continue to challenge our students to ensure excellence for all.

I want to commend Maple Ridge on this extraordinary effort in reading, and I hope these students will continue their love for reading throughout their lives.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated June 2, 2004, of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today the reforms and modernization committee from the Parliament of Zambia. Please join me in welcoming them here.

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to welcome a very prominent farmer of my riding and chairman of the board of Alfred College, campus of Guelph University, Mr Denis Perrault.

The Speaker: As you know, it's not a point of order, but welcome.

MOTIONS

SEXUAL ABUSE OF STUDENTS

MAUVAIS TRAITEMENTS D'ORDRE SEXUEL INFLIGÉS AUX ÉLÈVES

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr Speaker, I understand that there is unanimous consent for government motion 115 to be moved immediately and to be put to a vote after each of the three parties are given five minutes to speak, and that the Legislature will then observe a moment of silence in memory of the victims, following the vote.

1350

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mr McGuinty has moved for unanimous consent that government motion 115 be moved immediately and be put to a vote after each of the three parties are given five minutes to speak, and that following the vote there will be a moment of silence in memory of the victims. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I move that:

Whereas it is acknowledged that numerous incidents of physical and sexual abuse took place during the 1940s through 1970s at the St John's training school in Uxbridge and the St Joseph's training school in Alfred, which were operated by the Christian Brothers of Toronto and Ottawa and funded by the government of Ontario; and

Whereas it is acknowledged that the abuse suffered by the students at these schools has caused lifelong physical and emotional pain, distress and trauma to the men themselves and to their families and community and that such abuse of children is deplorable and intolerable; and

Whereas the victims bear no responsibility whatsoever for the abuse they suffered; and

Whereas child abuse is a serious social and community problem that must be addressed; and

Whereas the government, supported by the Christian Brothers of Ottawa and the Catholic archdioceses of Ottawa and Toronto, entered into agreements of reconciliation in 1992 and 1994 with the victims to overcome the aftermath of abuse experienced at the schools;

Therefore this House, on behalf of the people of Ontario, apologizes and expresses sincere regret for the harm caused to those boys in the care of St Joseph's and St John's training schools.

The Speaker: Mr McGuinty has moved government notice of motion number 115.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I rise today to bring a measure of closure to an episode in Ontario's history that has shocked and troubled all of us in this House and indeed every caring Ontarian. Over the course of several decades, hundreds of young residents—boys—of St John's training school in Alfred and St Joseph's training school in Uxbridge suffered horrible abuse at the very hands of those entrusted with their care and upbringing. Those schools were funded and overseen by the government of Ontario and were operated by the Christian Brothers, an order of the Roman Catholic Church.

Il a été établi sans conteste que bon nombre de ces enfants qui ont fréquenté ces écoles ont été les victimes de négligence et qu'ils ont été les victimes innocentes d'agressions physiques, sexuelles et verbales. Cette violence a laissé bon nombre d'entre eux avec des cicatrices émotionnelles profondes et permanentes.

It has been established beyond dispute that many of the children attending these schools were neglected and were the innocent victims of physical, sexual and verbal abuse that left many deep and abiding emotional scars. Many of these victims have been unable to form productive adult relationships or fully participate in the life of their community. Many are saddled with feelings of guilt, inadequacy, fear and embarrassment, and many former victims have tried to ease their pain through self-destructive behaviour. In short, hundreds of lives were seriously damaged at the very moment when the sheer wonder of life should have been just revealing itself to these children.

As the Premier of Ontario, it is my duty and responsibility to apologize unreservedly today for the neglect and abuse suffered by the children in these schools many years ago. I say directly to the victims: You were failed when you needed us most, and for that your government is, and always will be, very sorry.

I want to congratulate the victims for the courage they have shown in surviving the abuse, rebuilding their lives, raising awareness of what they endured and fighting for justice to be fully done.

It is my hope that these words and the unanimous agreement of this House with these words will represent the final chapter in our determination to do what is right and what is just for the children of Alfred and Uxbridge.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Very briefly, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I believe the Premier has eloquently echoed the apology given on behalf of the government of Ontario by former Attorney General Charles Harnick in 1996. Residential school abuse is a tragedy, and we fully support this apology on behalf of the government and the people of Ontario.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): On behalf of New Democrats, I want to confirm that we will be supporting the motion. This has been a very long time coming.

Let me say, as Attorney General at the time when Mr McCann and others courageously came forward in the early 1990s, I know personally of the anguish, the torture that many of these victims expressed, and their desire to have an alternative dispute resolution system, one which would have the Premier of the province apologize directly for what has happened. As I said, this has been a long time coming. The victims have been very patient in waiting this long.

People, especially children, in the care of the province or institutions funded or sanctioned by the province have a right to expect that their government will treat them in a

moral and ethical way. What happened at St John's and St Joseph's training schools was a horrible violation of that trust. It was a nightmare in which those charged with caring for children became violent abusers. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure nothing remotely like this ever happens again.

What this motion does acknowledge is that we still have an obligation to those who suffered, to those who have suffered all their lives because of this abuse. The victims still carry the physical and emotional pain, the distress and trauma of the abuse they suffered. An apology cannot undo the wrong that was done, but it was very clearly part of the agreement with the victims because the victims felt it would be meaningful and important.

I therefore join with members of this House in expressing our sincere and deep apologies for the events that took place at St John's and St Joe's. I want to recognize again the courage, the incredible courage of those who came forward.

The Speaker: Mr McGuinty has moved government notice of motion 115. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Would all members and guests please rise to observe a moment of silence in memory of the victims.

The House observed a moment's silence.

1400

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): To the Premier: On April 24 of this year, you told Graham Richardson on Focus Ontario, "Well, what we said all along—I'm very clear about this—is that we are not going to be raising taxes." What happened between April 24 and May 18, when your Treasurer introduced the budget and in fact raised taxes quite a bit?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know that the Leader of the Opposition must be as frustrated as the people of Ontario are about the fact that there was this $5.6-billion deficit hidden from us for such an extended period of time. What we decided to do, of course, was to make some very difficult decisions, but one of the most important things we have decided to do is to introduce a new law in Ontario that will prevent those kinds of shenanigans from ever being foisted on the people of Ontario again. The Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act will require that the state of public accounts be made available and public to the people of Ontario before an election. That will never, ever happen again because of our law.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary from the member for Erie-Lincoln.

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Premier, this is a very serious matter. Your 32 broken promises, promises that you committed to during the campaign and have already broken in seven months, are bad enough.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm just going to ask for special co-operation today before the member starts speaking. There is a lot of shouting going on.

Mr Hudak: The 32 broken promises alone in seven months are bad enough. Do we have the now-Premier of the province, in office, saying one thing—that taxes were not going up—when he knew full well that the Ministry of Finance was working on plans to bring in the biggest tax increase on middle-class families in the province of Ontario? Premier, when did you know that taxes were going up? Why did you tell people they were not, when you knew full well that they were going to? Did you say something that you knew was not the case or are you simply incompetent?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I appreciate the enthusiasm with which the question is put. The member opposite raises the notion of increased costs for families. I want to tell you about some of the other aspects of this budget. By providing free immunizations to children against deadly diseases, we are saving the average family $600 per child. Our two-year tuition freeze will save an arts student at the University of Toronto $318; the tuition freeze for a new medical student will save $1,960. With our proposed changes to the Tenant Protection Act, a family in a two-bedroom apartment in Toronto could save up to $250. By exempting intergenerational transfers of family farms from the land transfer tax, we are saving working farming families an average of $2,500. Our budget goes a long way to make up for eight and a half lost years of downloading responsibilities, not only on to municipalities but on the families. We're here for families.

Mr Hudak: The Premier is obviously avoiding a very serious matter. We are not talking about the word of the Leader of the Opposition when you're in opposition. That is bad enough—the broken promises. We're talking about what you have done to the trust the taxpayers have in the Office of the Premier of Ontario. We're talking about the word of the Premier of Ontario, who said on April 24 that taxes were not going up, when I say he knew full well that taxes were going up through the roof. Either you scrambled at the last minute on the back of a napkin to put that tax hike together, in which case you're incompetent, or you said with full knowledge on Focus Ontario that taxes were not going up, when you knew damned well they were going up big time. Which are you: incompetent, or are you telling stories?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to begin by assuring the member that the sound system is in fact working and there is no need for him to go over the top.

Since the member is so moved by his commitment to the people of Ontario, then on behalf of 12 million Ontarians, I will ask the member opposite to submit to the treasury a cheque for $9,000 for saddling the people of Ontario with a $5.6-billion deficit.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. May I beseech the members again to co-operate so we can have a good question

period. The shouting across is not helpful. I would very much appreciate that. We started off very wrong today.

Second question, the leader of the official opposition.

Mr Eves: The Prime Minister, Mr Martin, was quoted very recently in a Vancouver radio station interview as saying, "I would never stay in office if I did not keep my promises." In all fairness, I don't expect you to live up to commitments that you didn't make during the campaign, but I do expect you to live up to the commitment you made with the taxpayers' protection pledge when you said that if you raised taxes for any reason whatsoever—there was no contingency, no equivocating—you would hold a referendum before you did so. Will you live up to your word and hold the referendum that you said you would hold if you raised taxes for any reason whatsoever?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the leader of the official opposition is very concerned about honouring the Taxpayer Protection Act. I want to remind him of the vote that was taken in this House on June 27, 2002. At that particular time, as the government actively conspired to break the law—the Taxpayer Protection Act—it turns out that that particular vote was supported by Mr Baird, Mr Chudleigh, Mr Dunlop, Mr Eves, Mr Hardeman, Mr Hudak, Mr Jackson, Mr Klees, Mr Miller, Mr Runciman, Mr Sterling, Mr Wilson and Ms Witmer. All voted to break the Taxpayer Protection Act. So the leader has no standing, moral or otherwise, when it comes to lecturing us about doing the right thing on behalf of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker: Supplementary, the member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My supplementary is to the Premier. Premier, this is about your word. This is about the confidence—

Interjections.

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services, order. In some respects, it's very unfair when the government keeps on shouting, because there are questions that members would like to ask. The third party also would like to ask their questions. I'm going to ask you all again to co-operate. I presume you could pass a motion not to have question period today.

The member from Nepean-Carleton.

Mr Baird: Premier, when you sit down across the table with business people wanting to invest in Ontario, when you sit down with the federal government to negotiate a deal, it will all be about your word and the ability of others to trust you.

On April 24, five weeks ago, you said to Graham Richardson on Focus Ontario that you wouldn't raise taxes. You broke your promise to working families, and with the help, the support and the encouragement of David Herle, Paul Martin's campaign manager, you broke your word to raise taxes. Will you not stand in your place, inform the people of Ontario and tell them how much you paid Paul Martin's campaign manager to help you break your promise? How much did you pay Paul Martin's campaign manager to raise taxes on working families? Will you tell us before we vote on June 28, or are you going to pull the same trick and the same stunt you did in Hamilton East?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Notwithstanding his wishes to the contrary, this is not Parliament Hill. The member is not representing a federal constituency. This is Queen's Park.

Let me tell you what it is Ontarians are concerned about. They're concerned about the state of their health care. I think one of the things they're going to be asking themselves, as more and more are made aware of the contents of our budget, is why the member opposite and the members of the opposition are opposed to 36,000 additional cardiac procedures, 2,300 more joint replacements, nine new MRI and CT sites, 9,000 more cataract surgeries, and home care for close to 100,000 more Ontarians? The question Ontarians are having today, the one that weighs heavily on their minds, is how could anybody on that side of the House be opposed to investing in better health care for Ontario families?

1410

Mr Baird: Premier, you've become the poster child for political cynicism in Canada. There has never been a politician anywhere in the Dominion who has broken such a clear promise made to the people of Ontario. You've broken your word. You've lost the moral high ground. Premier, you can't be trusted.

If you're proud of your budget, as you've been crowing around the province, if you're so proud of your budget that you've begun to use taxpayers' and tax-creditable political donations to spin the people of Ontario, will you stand in your place and say that you will keep your word, that you will keep the faith, and that you will allow the people of Ontario to vote on this budget you're so proud of? Will you do that, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: There are a few questions to which I believe the answers are very clear. Number one: Did we make some difficult decisions is this budget? You bet we did. Number two: Did the former government hide a $5.6-billion deficit from the people of Ontario? Yes, they did.

Let me tell you that I will put my name, my word and my integrity on the line any day when it comes to standing up for the defence of Ontario families and doing what I think is the right thing to do when it comes to investing in their health care and their education. This budget is not designed to support our political imperatives; it's designed to help Ontario families, and we will not back off, ever, from doing the right thing for Ontario.

The Speaker: New question? The leader of the third party.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. With each passing day, the outcry against your budget and your unfair and regressive middle-income tax grab grows louder and louder. Ontarians are furious that a single mom with an income of $30,000 a year will see her provincial income tax increase by 24%, while someone with an income of $200,000 a year will see their provincial income tax increase by only 3%.

Ontarians have always been willing to pay for investments in health care and education, but what they want to know, Premier, is simply this: You could have closed the employer health tax loophole.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I will start naming members now if this continues, because it seems to me I have no control over question period these days.

The leader of the third party.

Mr Hampton: The question is, Premier, you could have closed the employer health tax loophole. You could have restored corporate taxes to the level they were at in 1998, when all corporations were making healthy profits. You could have said to the people who got a 35% tax reduction from the Conservatives, those with incomes over $100,000 a year, "It's time for you to contribute again." Instead, you went after modest- and middle-income working families and you whacked them to the tune of $2 billion. Why did you go after working families, Premier? Why did you side with the rich and powerful?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, it's passing strange that the leader of the third party, who is now telling us that we should be taxing corporations, did not side with us when we rolled back corporate tax cuts. I'm just wondering where he stands today. Earlier on, he was a champion of free enterprise on behalf of corporations, when today apparently he is not.

Here are some of the facts connected with our new premium: A single parent making $30,000 per year with $3,000 in child care expenses will pay a premium of $300. A person making $250,000 has an overall average tax rate of 39.9% in Ontario, including $11,410 just in Ontario surtaxes. We think that what we put in place is progressive and fair.

Mr Hampton: This has to be the all-time newsmaker. The Premier says that for a single-parent mom, it's OK to increase her provincial income tax by 24%. Meanwhile, for somebody who has an income of $200,000, you just increase his income tax by 3%, and it's fair. Boy, this really has to make news. Maybe you can explain this one: A family with a $50,000 income will be paying $16,000 more in income tax, while that individual who has a $200,000 income will pay 3% more.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): It's 16%.

Mr Hampton: So 16% versus 3%. Maybe you can explain that one, Premier. Maybe you can explain to the people of Ontario how that's fair.

Hon Mr McGuinty: It doesn't hurt to inject a little bit of truth into this debate. Just so we understand, an individual with a taxable income up to $20,000 doesn't pay anything by way of a premium. If you're earning by way of taxable income $21,000, then your premium for 2005 will be $60. If you're earning $48,500, then your premium for 2005—again, that's taxable income—will be $575. Just so we understand—we don't take this lightly. We are imposing an additional burden on families, no doubt about that. We're not denying that. But we've done so in a way that is reasonable, responsible and progressive, notwithstanding the member opposite's contentions to the contrary.

Mr Hampton: I'll inject a little truth into your statements. Here's your tables: He has an income—he's a teacher—of $50,000 a year. He pays $600. His wife, who is a nurse, has an income of $52,000 a year. She pays $600. That works out to $1,200 a year from your tables, if you want to know the truth. Meanwhile, while you're whacking working families to the tune of $2 billion a year, the banks—oh, God, they need a tax break—are going to get a $1-billion tax break from you. Explain that to the people of Ontario. Why are the banks getting a $1-billion tax reduction thanks to Dalton McGuinty, while working families get whacked an extra $2 billion? Explain that fairness.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I understand that it serves the leader of the third party's purposes to be creative when it comes to his presentation of the consequences of our budget, but we feel a responsibility to tell people what's happening specifically as a result of the budget. Again, in addition to the member—he doesn't seem to be prepared to accept that the maximum that an individual can pay would be $900. I don't know how he could come up with $16,000.

Again, there are other aspects to the budget, too. I indicated earlier that a family, as a result of these free immunizations, will save $600 per child. We're helping low- and middle-income seniors by giving them a break on their property taxes to the tune of up to $125. For example, our contribution to the TTC helped avert a fare hike of 25 cents per ride, saving regular TTC users $100 annually. So there's lots of good news in this budget for Ontario families.

1420

The Speaker: New question?

Mr Hampton: To the Premier again, these are your tables. I didn't make these up. I didn't create them. Do you recognize this? It's your budget document. These are your tables. An individual with an income of $50,000 a year pays $600. Husband pays $600; wife pays $600; together they pay $1,200. And your Minister of Finance, what does he pay? One per cent more. He pays $900. That's the unfairness of this. That's what's so grossly unfair.

But you didn't answer my question. My question was, while working families are going to get whacked $2 billion as a result of your budget, can you tell me why those needy, desperate, impoverished banks are going to get a $1-billion reduction in their taxes?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Here is the information I've just been provided, and I assume it comes from finance. A $50,000 gross income teacher and a $52,000 nurse with $5,000 in child care deductions would pay an Ontario health premium of $1,050 combined. You're talking $1,050 combined. That is considerably less than the $16,000 that the member opposite would have us believe.

Mr Hampton: All right, Premier. Let's have it your way. He has a taxable income of $50,000 as a teacher. She's a nurse and has a taxable income of $50,000.

According to your tables, she will pay $600, he will pay $600 and together they will pay $1,200. And all those working families together will pay $2 billion as a result of your budget. Meanwhile, the desperate, impoverished banks will get a $1-billion tax reduction. I ask you again, why did you decide to stick it to working families while banks get a $1-billion tax reduction from your budget, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm wondering again, why did the leader of the third party vote with the banks when we put forward a bill in this House to roll back corporate tax cuts? Where was he at that time?

Again, this is a budget that goes a long way to help out struggling families. Immunizations alone will save families $600 per child. Our two-year tuition freeze will save an arts student at the University of Toronto $318. A new medical student will save $1,960.

This budget and this premium are not easy things. We accept that. We understand that. But this investment will enable us to improve the quality of health care that we deliver to all Ontario families.

Mr Hampton: I'm not sure what it is, but maybe the Premier is having difficulty hearing. The question is this: Why should a working family, his taxable income $50,000 and her taxable income $50,000—their auto insurance premiums have already gone up 20%, despite your promise, their hydro bill has gone up 20%, despite your promise, the natural gas bill, the driver's licence bill, their property taxes have all gone up. Why are they being hit an extra $1,200 a year by your budget while those terribly impoverished banks are getting a $1-billion tax reduction from the Dalton McGuinty government? That's the question. Will you finally answer it, please?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I say to the leader of the third party, why this discovery of religion on the road to Damascus here? Why did he originally vote with the banks? Why did he originally say he would not support our bill to roll back corporate tax cuts? That's what Ontario families are wondering today. Where will he be tomorrow? Yesterday he was with the banks, today he's against them and who knows where he'll be tomorrow.

Our budget and its premium are designed to make absolutely essential investments in health care. I'm talking about everything from 8,000 more full-time nursing positions, 12,000 additional bed lifts, 150 family health teams and home care for 100,000 more Ontarians. This is a heck of a budget when it comes to supporting families.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. I'd like a page to deliver a document to the Premier. I'd like you to listen these statements:

"I don't think we should have delisted optometrists.

"Eye care is health care.

"My hope is that during the debate there'll be an opportunity to reinstate it. This isn't the final deal. It goes to debate and goes to committee.

"I think it's very false savings to delist optometry."

I send that over to you because, you see, Premier, that was not said by an optometrist; that was said by your backbencher the member from Prince Edward-Hastings. He stood in his place earlier today and in fact denied that he said that. That, sir, is a transcript. I would like to know from you, will you in fact agree with your backbencher that you will have public hearings on this budget to give people like your member from Prince Edward-Hastings an opportunity—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The question has been asked. Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm going to ask the member from Erie-Lincoln—I'm going to warn you this time; the next time I'll be naming you.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The Minister of Health.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think we all recognize that there are decisions in the budget that were challenging around some services. In aligning our optometry services in this province with other provinces across the country, we've reached out and done what we can to protect those in our society who are most vulnerable. We've made sure that kids under 20 have access to these services and we've certainly made sure that seniors do.

But we've gone further. We're working with the optometrists to ensure that those people who require these services on a medically necessary basis are going to continue to have the services covered in full by OHIP, as has always been the case.

Like other governments before us, we faced prioritization. We've made significant investments in community-based services, including a very significant investment in family health teams. Family health teams are a place where Ontarians will get their care, including the eye care that they determine.

Mr Klees: This sidestepping of the issue qualifies the member from Prince Edward-Hastings for a position on the front benches of this government. I wonder when he will be promoted as minister.

The issue here is the fact that this government has made a statement and the Premier refuses to answer this question. I'm simply asking for the same thing that his backbencher has asked for, and that is committee hearings on this budget so that members like the member from Prince Edward-Hastings can in fact argue in committee against what he considers to be an irresponsible act on the part of his government. Will the Premier commit to having committee hearings on the budget over the course of the summer? That's the question I'm asking. Please, Premier, will you commit to giving your backbenchers an opportunity to represent their constituents on these issues?

Hon Mr Smitherman: In response to the honourable member's question, I think it would be appropriate to remind him that the initiative we're taking is to ensure that those people who require optometry services on a medically necessary basis will continue to do so. We've

made options and there are choices in this budget. I think the choices we've made—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm going to warn the member from Simcoe-Grey, the next outburst across and I'll have to name you.

Hon Mr Smitherman: On the very issue of contrast and choices, it seems interesting to have an intervention finally from the member from Simcoe-Grey who, when he was the Minister of Health in the early days of that government, brought in and stood proudly behind a budget that cut hospital funding by 3.5% and led to the most audacious of statements from a government in the history of this province, and that was that nurses were hula hoops. That's their record on health care.

Mr Klees: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The Premier did not answer the question.

The Speaker: That's not a point of order. New question? The member for Nickel Belt.

1430

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Premier. Premier, your decision to delist eye exams from OHIP makes no sense, but what makes even less sense is the suggestion by the Minister of Health that a patient might need a referral from a family doctor in order to get an OHIP-covered eye exam. A diabetic whose eye care is already being monitored by an optometrist shouldn't have to go to a doctor in order to get a referral to that optometrist. Thousands and thousands of Ontarians don't have a family doctor, so you're going to force them to go to an after-hours clinic or an emergency ward to get a referral to see an optometrist.

Look, optometrists are highly qualified primary care providers. They ensure good, direct access for patients to eye care, and there is no need to impede that access by forcing them to see a doctor to get a referral first. Premier, why don't you just do the right thing and announce that all eye exams will be covered under OHIP?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The Minister of Health.

Hon Mr Smitherman: The member, in her question, makes a point of the fact that too many Ontarians are struggling with access to a family doctor. I wonder why that is, I ask the member of the New Democratic Party and their government, that when they were in government, they cut the number of spots in medical schools that caused the problem of shortages of doctors in this province.

Secondly, she obviously misses the point, which is that these medically necessary services for people with diabetes, as an example, will continue to be covered. But she misses one other important point as well: We have a different plan around family health teams and around the provision of primary care. It is that instead of one silo here and one silo there, which she continues to be a proponent of, we'll bring together interdisciplinary teams of health care providers working in a complementary fashion. It isn't all about a doctor over here and an optometrist over here and a nurse or a nurse practitioner over here and over there. It is about a vision for primary health care.

Ms Martel: May I remind the minister that his plan for family health teams doesn't even include optometrists, so who is he trying to kid? This move is going to do nothing to improve primary health care. In fact, it's going to increase the burden on doctors who are already overworked. It's going to decrease the legitimate role of optometrists in the health care system. It's going to reduce Ontarians' direct access, which they have now, to optometrists because thousands and thousands of people don't have a family doctor and won't be able to get a referral.

Add to that the enormous cost to the health care system when you force people to go to an emergency ward or an after-hours clinic to see a family doctor to get a referral. That's a complete waste of health care dollars. I say to the minister, optometrists are primary health care providers. They have an important role in the system. Patients should have direct access to them, and that access should be paid by OHIP. Reverse your decision.

Hon Mr Smitherman: The longer the honourable member talks, the more she makes my point. Optometrists and other providers ought to be part of a primary health care delivery team, and we're moving forward on a team approach. The honourable member makes a point. She argues with extraordinary vigour for the status quo, but the status quo has been failing. At least a million Ontarians don't have access. What has our government done in our budget? We've made choices in five distinct areas. We've given considerable new funding to drive resources to the community, provide care closer to home, where people need it, and divert traffic flow from our hospitals. That is our plan. It's funded, and it will soon be operational. You will see that there is an opportunity in family health teams to provide—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The government House leader and the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal are on the verge of being named. I'm warning them.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): My question is for the Minister of Health. It has been estimated by the Canadian Mental Health Association that every year it costs the Canadian economy $14.4 billion in lost productivity due to mental illness and that one in five people will experience a mental health illness during their lifetime. Due to such staggering figures, what is the government doing and what is it going to do to ensure that those who suffer from mental illness are properly treated?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm enormously proud of the steps we've taken in our budget to address 12 lost years—two governments of two political stripes that failed over a period of time to make the necessary investments in community-based mental health.

I'm excited that our government's budget includes $65 million in new spending on community-based mental

health services. This will increase to over $185 million by the fourth year of our mandate. This increase is the first in 12 years, since before Bob Rae's hair turned grey. It will provide us with the opportunity to better fund case management, crisis response and early intervention to prevent—here again, one more time, the opportunity is there: Invest at the community level, drive resources to the community, closer to home where people need it, and divert traffic flow from our institutions like hospitals. That is our plan. Mental health is one important component—65 million new dollars in 2004-05.

Mr Peterson: Some mental health associations such as the one in Windsor-Essex have a nurse practitioner on-site. According to the Windsor-Essex mental health association, their preliminary findings show that primary care services reduced hospitalizations by 74% and the number of days in hospital by 78%. I would like to know if your ministry supports such programs.

Hon Mr Smitherman: If there's one thing I've got a sense of in the last 45 seconds, it's that we all agree on the incredible importance and amazing versatility of deployment of nurse practitioners in our province. The fact of the matter remains that if we had more of them, we could use them. What has this government done in its budget? It has dramatically enhanced our production line so we'll have more nurse practitioners available in a variety of settings.

To the member's very specific point about the deployment of nurse practitioners in a proactive, community-based way, including in community mental health, we're excited to see the role that nurse practitioners are playing in Windsor-Essex, and I can confirm to the honourable member that nurse practitioners factor in our plans to enhance community health care for people suffering from mental illness.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Premier. I listened to your health minister, and he says you have a plan for this and a plan for that. But the reality is, you had a health plan during the campaign that guaranteed all Ontarians access to health care services based on need, not ability to pay, and you were elected on that plan. That's the reason we weren't elected, because this is what you said. I want you to stand in your place today and tell the 1.2 million patients who visit the chiropractor that you are prepared to reinstate chiropractic services and pay for them under OHIP.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Health will want to speak to this.

1440

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I would acknowledge to the honourable member that there are a lot of people in the province of Ontario who use and feel benefit from chiropractic. There's no argument on our part. I'm someone who has used those services in the past. The decision to delist these services was a difficult one, but it's about priorities.

The member will obviously know from her three years as the Minister of Health in this province that there is a difference between those services which are therapeutically beneficial and those which are protected by the Canada Health Act and are medically necessary. We had to make a difficult decision because the fact of the matter is clear in our province: There are many medically necessary services that we have not been able to fund adequately, and our government's commitments remain clear there. We chose some priorities; they were difficult. Some difficult decisions were made. But I stand enormously proud of the budget that invests $2.2 billion—7.3% growth—in the kind of community-based care that we believe is the recipe for the transformation of our health care system to make it sustainable, to the benefit of future generations of Ontarians. That is our fundamental responsibility.

Mrs Witmer: I would remind the Minister of Health that there are about 1.2 million people in this province who have been denied access to chiropractic services. You made a pledge. You said that you were going to provide the service based on need and not on ability to pay.

We have received thousands and thousands of petitions from people who tell us that this is a cost-effective and efficient care that allows them to lead a healthy life and to function. They are telling us that presently you're going to save about $100 million, but what you are going to do is increase the cost of care because it's going to cost more than $200 million for these same patients to go to physicians or to hospital emergency rooms or to use drugs. Will you now acknowledge that your plan to delist chiropractic services is not appropriate, and will you reinstate?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I think it's important to acknowledge that in our health care system in this province there are a wide range of therapeutically beneficial services that do not enjoy any benefit from OHIP, and chiropractic now is amongst those. But the fact of the matter is that we had to make choices.

The member talks about primary care. I'm pleased to be able to say that as a result of the priorities and choices that we made, $100 million saved on chiropractic allows for a $111-million new investment in primary care in 2004-05; that $100 million saved from chiropractic allows for an $80-million new investment in immunizations for our kids; $100 million saved in chiropractic allows for a direct $100-million investment in the expansion of community care access centres; $100 million saved in chiropractic contributes to $406 million of new money for our long-term-care facilities. It is, at the end of the day, a difficult choice but a priority that we stand behind.

TORONTO POLICE SERVICE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Premier. Premier, the Toronto Police

Services Board is in turmoil, as we all know. Recently two members threw a tantrum and walked out to break quorum to stop a vote they thought they might lose. As you know, one member, Norm Gardner, is under suspension, yet he refuses to resign, leaving the board short one critical member at this time.

Your Minister of Community Safety says Gardner should resign, but he says he doesn't have the authority to do anything about it. Premier, you can do something about it: You can change the law. I ask you today, will you pass special legislation to fire Norm Gardner and replace him with a new provincial appointee?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Speaker, I refer this to the minister.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member should know that, first of all, what I said was that it would be helpful if Norm Gardner would resign. But you also should know that, notwithstanding that OCCOPS has suspended him for the rest of the his term without pay, he has sought judicial review of that decision. As long as that process is in place, I cannot and will not interfere with it.

Ms Churley: Back to the Premier: I don't know what your minister is afraid of here. He's got to go. You can't keep standing behind these excuses. I have been asking you and your minister for some weeks now to help out the Toronto Police Services Board. Now Mayor David Miller says Norm Gardner should resign. He continues to say that he won't. You can't just continue to stand back and watch from the sidelines while this board descends into chaos. You need to live up to your responsibility.

I'm going to tell you again, if you bring in a special bill to replace Norm Gardner, we will give it special quick passage—

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Monday.

Ms Churley: Monday. Yes, bring it back on Monday.

Premier, the choice is yours. I'm going to ask you again to take your responsibility seriously and fire Norm Gardner, or are you going to continue to wash your hands of this?

Hon Mr Kwinter: I find it rather strange that a member of this Legislature is advocating that I should introduce a law to break the law. I can tell you this: Right at the present time there is no intention on behalf of this ministry to break the law.

AIR QUALITY

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Today marks the sixth anniversary of Clean Air Day. Clean Air Day was proclaimed by the government of Canada to increase public awareness and action on two key environmental priorities: clean air and climate change.

As summer approaches, we are bracing for another summer of smog-filled days. Smog days not only hurt our most vulnerable populations, they also hurt our economy. The facts are well documented. An Ontario Medical Association report showed that air pollution in Ontario leads to almost 10,000 hospital admissions, 13,000 hospital room visits and 47 million sick days for employees each year. In real dollars this costs Ontario taxpayers and businesses more than $1 billion annually.

It is imperative that we all be encouraged and we all understand that we are all part of the solution, that we all have a role to play in making Ontario's air cleaner. Minister, what can we do to reduce air pollution? How can we make the air we breathe cleaner?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I'm very happy to have this opportunity to focus on what is a very important day. It is an opportunity for this government to share with the people of Ontario what they can do in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their places of work across the province to improve air quality.

Of course, the very first thing is that they can be more responsible in terms of how they use energy in their homes, be more efficient, because the more efficient they are, the more they reduce the demand for energy, the less energy that is needed to be produced, and that has an impact on air quality.

One example is, as we come into the summer season, those people who enjoy air conditioning should perhaps just turn the temperature up a little bit. That is going to have an impact on the amount of energy that is used.

Also, another thing I would like to share with the member, particularly in those communities where public transit is available, is that people across the province should avail themselves of public transit and take cars off the roads. They contribute significantly to air pollution.

Mr Zimmer: These are, of course, important steps. They are necessary steps in ensuring we can breathe the air. But it doesn't stop with Ontario; air quality is an issue across North America.

Just today, the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation released its annual report, Taking Stock: North American Pollutant Releases and Transfers in 2001. It reported that although North American emissions declined by 18%, Canadian emissions rose by 3%.

Minister, what is your ministry doing to ensure that Ontario plays its vital role in reducing emissions, and what is it doing to ensure that we all have clean air?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: The report that was released today, I think, even though it reflected events in the year 2001, is a very good reminder to the people of this province why our commitment to cleaner air, the commitment of the McGuinty government, is so very important.

I'm very proud to say that in just eight months, the McGuinty government has done more to improve the environment than the previous eight years. One of the things we've done is, we have committed to close coal-fired plants by the year 2007. I'm also happy that the Ministry of the Environment will be introducing programs to educate Ontarians on how we might conserve energy and develop renewable energy sources.

1450

I recently announced the toughest emissions standards in North America for diesel vehicles. Our government is committed to cleaner air by 2007. I am proud that our government signed an agreement with the federal government to work on climate change. I'm also proud that recently our Premier went to Washington to plead the—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

MEMBER'S COMMENTS

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): My question today is for the Premier. Today, I was shocked to read in the newspaper that one of your own MPPs made a harassing statement when he declared that "there's just too many white people" on our agencies, boards and commissions. I'm not even sure what group he is referring to in that broad term.

The Human Rights Code provides a definition of "harassment." It "means engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome." This is a very serious matter. Under the Human Rights Code, "Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to employment without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, record of offences, marital status, same-sex partnership status, family status or disability."

Premier, will you be disciplining Mr Qaadri for his comments? Will you ask him for his resignation?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to a very important matter, and I know that all members in this Legislature understand how important it is to tread lightly in this area so that we will not be seen to fan something that we don't want to fan.

I'll tell you what our intention is. Our intention is to draw on all the talent that is available to us in the province of Ontario. We are looking for competent, qualified people who represent all of Ontario. That is the beginning of the end of our particular focus when it comes to making sure we have the best people doing jobs on behalf of the government.

Ms Scott: Mr Premier, the agencies, boards and commissions of this government ought to try to represent the people from all backgrounds and from all parts of the province. Based on the comments by Mr Qaadri, is it reasonable that white people might believe that their applications to serve on agencies, boards and commissions would not be considered by your government? You need to take decisive action. Will you ask Mr Qaadri to resign?

Hon Mr McGuinty: We are determined to ensure that every Ontarian gets a fair shake. That's all we want to do. The member opposite may not want to hear this. I'm not sure why they could have something against every Ontarian getting a fair shake. We are looking for competent, qualified people. We want to draw on all the talent available to us. What could be wrong with that?

ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Premier. The Royal Botanical Gardens says it will have to close on July 31 of this year if you don't come up with $1.7 million in funding. If that happens, it will be a shocking blow to Hamilton, to the region in that area, to Halton and to our tourism industry for both areas.

On May 6 in this House you said, "We are going to work as hard as we can to ensure that the Royal Botanical Gardens is around for a long, long time." That was during the Hamilton East by-election, Mr Premier. Yet your Minister of Culture says there's no money left in the kitty. Premier, which is it? Are you going to save the RBG or is this yet another broken promise?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I am delighted to welcome the member opposite's assistance when it comes to this matter. There are three parties, as I understand it, who have traditionally provided funding to the RBG. There's the province of Ontario, the city of Hamilton and the region of Halton. Just so we understand, we've been providing less than 23% of the funding. I am convinced—and I maintain this—that if the province, the city of Hamilton, the region of Halton and any private sector supporters come together, we can find some kind of an arrangement whereby we can guarantee the survival of the Royal Botanical Gardens. If the member has any particular positive proposal that she'd like to put on the table so that we can work together, I would be delighted to hear that.

Ms Horwath: Premier, as a matter of fact, I do have a proposal. The RBG is a provincial agency, as you know. That makes it your responsibility, not the responsibility of the city of Hamilton, which is already burdened by the weight of other things like the downloading we are dealing with, as you know. As you also know, you only provide 20% of the operating funding of this facility while the Royal Ontario Museum gets 50% and the Ontario Science Centre gets 54%. Why does Hamilton get the short end of the stick? Why does this attraction not get its fair share of funding? And why are you not keeping your promise to save this beautiful attraction in Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the minister would like to add something.

Hon Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Two weeks ago we met with a member of the board of the RBG and also a politician from the mayor of Hamilton. We are discussing how we can support the RBG but we're still waiting for their financial plan. When we receive their financial plan, our staff will sit together and we'll try to find a solution for the RBG.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. As you know, people with disabilities face numerous barriers. All too often we don't notice how difficult life's daily activities can be for someone else. This is National Access Awareness Week, which helps to remind us that there are over 1.5 million people in this province living with disabilities, people who show incredible courage and strength each and every day.

The last eight years have not been easy for Ontarians with disabilities. I would like to ask the minister what is being done to help National Access Awareness Week reach its goal of bringing Canadians together to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in community life.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I would like to thank my colleague for the question and for his work as critic in this area as well, which informed us in developing our platform.

Since becoming Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, with the ODA as part of my responsibility, we have consulted widely across the province, and, again, I'd like to thank my parliamentary assistant, Dr Kular, for his assistance in these consultations. We are committed to strengthening the act by the fall of 2004.

I'd like to take advantage of the fact that it is accessibility week to announce that we committed half a million dollars to enabling change programs two days ago that will make a significant impact on improving accessibility for people with disabilities. One of the projects is that the Canadian Standards Association will develop resources with businesses to assist organizations to improve customer services for people with disabilities, because we intend to engage the private sector much more in fulfilling their obligations to people with disabilities.

Mr Parsons: I'm very pleased to know that a minister in the McGuinty government is marking National Access Awareness Week with such an important funding announcement. However, the fact remains that many disability advocates have pointed to the present ODA and its shortcomings as a vital key to improving accessibility for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

I had the privilege on Tuesday morning of speaking to a number of representatives of Ontarians with disabilities in Brockville who were dismayed at the lack of consultation that took place with them by the previous government and thrilled with the consultation that has happened by this minister over the past couple of months. For them, the challenge they face every day can be helped and improved by actions of this government. I am so thrilled to have seen the actions that have happened. Their question to me, which I would like to pass on to you, is, when can we expect to see measures introduced to improve the present Ontarians with Disabilities Act?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Our commitment and our platform was to come up with a stronger Ontarians with Disabilities Act within a year of taking office. We will meet that commitment. We're working very hard. We've consulted earnestly across the province and we will extend the rights and responsibilities to other sectors, other than just the public sector. This does take a lot of time, but we're working very quickly and hope to have this done by the fall of 2004.

1500

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for Premier McGuinty. I want to congratulate you on running radio ads eight months after you were elected. Of course, this is the anniversary, eight months today.

Last year at this time, you asked for Chris Stockwell's resignation because he used riding association money as part payment for a working vacation as Minister of Energy. Your claim was that people who donated to the riding association received a tax receipt—a cost to taxpayers. Now, just today, radio ads costing $100,000 of tax-receiptable funds are being aired across Ontario. In these ads you try to justify the albatross budget health care premium that you have personally hung around the necks of both our Prime Minister and every working family in the province of Ontario. How can you, of all people, the one who criticized Stockwell on the one hand and then on the other hand has run taxpayer-funded, partisan radio ads trying to justify the worst budget in the province of Ontario?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I recall that after the Magna budget this government spent millions of dollars—and I'm talking about glossy householders and radio ads. Not everybody is going to be able to hear that ad, because they are busy, but I thought maybe I would give it to them here now. It says:

"I'm Dalton McGuinty, and I want you to know that every penny of Ontario's new health care premium will go to health care. It'll mean shorter waits for radiation and chemotherapy, nine new MRI sites, home care for 95,000 more Ontarians, meningitis vaccinations for children, 8,000 new full-time nursing positions, and together we're going to build a health care system we can all be proud of."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. A point of order from the member from Simcoe-Grey.

Interjections.

The Speaker: If you rise—I'm going to warn you, and the next time you do that again, I'm going to name you.

The member from Simcoe-Grey.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): On a point of privilege, I guess, Mr Speaker: I just want you to look into the comments that were made by the member for Etobicoke North, Mr Qaadri, in terms of, is it not illegal to ask

anyone for the colour of their skin when they're applying for an—

The Speaker: Order. That's not a point of privilege and not a point of order.

PETITIONS

RECREATIONAL TRAILERS

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas many owners of seasonal trailers kept at campgrounds have raised their concerns over the impact on property taxes on seasonal trailers and the unfairness of imposing a new tax on persons who use minimum municipal services;

"Whereas this new tax will discourage businesses and tourism opportunities in Ontario and will cause many families to give up their vacation trailers all together;

"Whereas the administration of this tax will require a substantial investment in staff time and resources across the province of Ontario;

"Whereas some representatives of the recreational vehicle industry, campground providers and trailer owners have suggested an alternative sticker or tag system to establish fees for seasonal trailers;

"Therefore, we the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Parliament of Ontario immediately abandon the assessment of taxation of recreational trailers used on a seasonal basis in 2004, and that the government of Ontario consult with all stakeholders regarding the development of a fair and reasonable sticker or tag fee that would apply to recreational trailers used on a seasonal basis."

I affix my name in support.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I've got a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas auto insurance rates continue to skyrocket, contrary to the official position of the Liberal government and the insurance industry; and

"Whereas more and more drivers are being cut off by their insurance companies for no valid reason and are being dumped into the Facility Association; and

"Whereas all attempts to regulate the auto insurance industry have failed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Ontario government immediately introduce legislation that would bring to Ontario a public, not-for-profit automobile insurance program similar to the ones currently in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia."

I have affixed my signature as well, and Meghan the page is delivering it to the table.

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from my constituents in Parry Sound-Muskoka. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the district of Muskoka is currently designated as part of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the geography and socio-economic conditions of Muskoka are very similar to the rest of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the median family income in the district of Muskoka is $10,000 below the provincial average and $6,000 below the median family income for greater Sudbury; and

"Whereas removing the district of Muskoka from northern Ontario would adversely affect the hard-working people of Muskoka by restricting access to programs and incentives enjoyed by residents of other northern communities; and

"Whereas the residents of Muskoka should not be confused with those who cottage or vacation in the district; and

"Whereas the federal government of Canada recognizes the district of Muskoka as part of the north; and

"Whereas this is a mean-spirited and politically motivated decision on the part of the McGuinty government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government maintain the current definition of northern Ontario for the purposes of government policy and program delivery."

I have some 300 signatures here, and I affix mine to support it.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Because social assistance rates were slashed by 21.6% in 1995, and with the increase in the cost of living, that cut is worth about 34.4% today; and

"Because current social assistance rates do not allow recipients to meet their cost of living; and

"Because the people of Ontario deserve an adequate standard of living and are guaranteed such by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

"Because the jury at the inquest into the death of Kimberly Rogers recommended that social assistance rates be reviewed so that they reflect the actual costs of living;

"We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase the shelter portion of Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program benefits to the

average Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp rent levels and index social assistance to the cost of living."

I agree with the petitioners. I have affixed my signature to this.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who" have chosen to "leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry or re-entry of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I affix my signature to this petition.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's my pleasure to present a petition on behalf of constituents of the riding of Durham. Louise Lalande and Gay Ayotte are just two.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas gasoline prices have continued to increase at alarming rates in recent months; and

"Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario's drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors, such as tourism and transportation;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government consider an immediate gas price freeze for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate; and

"That the Dalton McGuinty provincial government petition the federal Liberal government to step up to the plate and lower gas prices by removing the GST on gasoline products and fix the federal Competition Act to ensure consumers are protected and that the market operates in a fair and transparent manner."

I'm pleased to sign this in support of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

1510

GOVERNMENT CONSULTANTS

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition I'm going to present today and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas former Premier Mike Harris received $18,000 in consulting fees from Ontario Hydro;

"Whereas he did this consulting work less than a year after he resigned his position as Premier of Ontario;

"Whereas this contract is just another example of the Conservative country club created by the previous government at Ontario Hydro and Ontario Power Generation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to order former Premier Mike Harris to pay back the taxpayers of Ontario by returning the consultant fees he received from Ontario Hydro."

As I agree with this petition, I affix my signature to it.

NANTICOKE GENERATING STATION

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): "Whereas OPG (Ontario Power Generation) Nanticoke has been threatened with closure; and

"Whereas the Ontario government has recently invested $250 million into the development and application of selective catalytic reduction at Nanticoke and Lambton that will reduce 80% of nitrous oxide emissions, and the use of low sulphur coal has reduced sulphur dioxide by 60% since the early 1980s; and

"Whereas on a megawatt-to-megawatt basis, the Nanticoke station is far cleaner than the vast majority of the over 200 coal-fired stations in the United States, and emissions from the US account for more than 50% of the smog in Ontario; and

"Whereas Nanticoke supplies up to 20% of the energy produced in Ontario every year and is therefore a scapegoat for emissions concerns; and

"Whereas the McGuinty-Liberal closure of coal-fired plants would stick taxpayers with a $6-billion bill and have a significant impact on local economies;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario support the 600 workers of the OPG Nanticoke generating facility by continuing efforts aimed at reducing emissions while maintaining power production at Nanticoke."

TAXATION

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition signed by a number of good citizens of Cambridge.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Hands Off Our Wallets

"Whereas the Liberal Premier McGuinty promised as part of his election platform that he would not raise taxes; and;

"Whereas the Ontario Liberal budget on May 18 imposes an increase of income tax ranging from $300 to $900 per person, in addition to a $3.9-billion electricity rate hike; and

"Whereas false promises of Liberal Premier McGuinty adversely affect the trust between Ontarians and their elected representatives;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We petition that the Liberal Premier keep his promise and agree not to impose higher taxes."

I set my name thereto.

TTC RIGHT-OF-WAY

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I keep getting petitions regarding the St Clair Avenue West TTC right-of-way, and the petition reads as follows:

"Whereas an environmental assessment (EA) is underway on St Clair Avenue West to study potential transit improvements, including the possibility of installing a dedicated TTC right-of-way;

"Whereas the consultation process so far has been in bad faith, top-down and rushed, which has disappointed and angered the local community almost entirely, and not been up to any acceptable public standards;...

"Whereas a dedicated right-of-way would restrict left-turn access to neighbourhood streets north and south of St Clair, and a barrier down the centre of St Clair would force the vast majority of residents to make U-turns and go further out of their way just to get home or go to work;

"Whereas a dedicated ROW would force significantly more traffic on to our local streets;

"Whereas safety must be a high priority for any alternative selected and, according to ambulance and fire department staff, they don't like to work with right-of-ways;

"Whereas a ROW would lead to the reduction or elimination of on-street parking on St Clair Avenue West;

"Whereas traffic bottlenecks at certain intersections and underpasses are already terrible, and certain chronically problematic intersections and underpasses could not stand to lose one of their existing two lanes;...

"Whereas there is no guarantee that a dedicated ROW will improve transit service substantially, as the number of streetcars serving the street will actually be reduced;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, strongly urge the Minister of the Environment to order a full environmental assessment on St Clair Avenue West, one that genuinely consults and takes into consideration the views and opinions of the local community."

Since I agree, I affix my signature to this petition.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill at site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

"Whereas the county of Simcoe has received, over a period of time, the necessary approvals from the Ministry of the Environment to design and construct a landfill at site 41; and

"Whereas, as part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of site 41 identified over 200 recommendations for improvements to the design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has indicated her intention to introduce legislation on water source protection, which is a final and key recommendation to be implemented under Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has announced expert panels that will make recommendations to the minister on water source protection legislation; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment will now be responsible for policing nutrient management; and

"Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario. We believe the legislation will affect the design of site 41 and the nearby water sources."

I'm pleased to sign my name to that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Petitions. The member from Davenport.

Interjections.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Thank you very much. I like the Conservative backbenchers. They're just great today.

I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario which reads a follows:

"Whereas the so-called 'Tenant Protection Act' of the defeated Harris-Eves Tories has allowed landlords to increase rents well above the rate of inflation for new and old tenants alike;

"Whereas the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal created by this act regularly awards major and permanent additional rent increases to landlords to pay for required one-time improvements and temporary increases in utility costs;

"Whereas the same act has given landlords wide-ranging powers to evict tenants;

"Whereas before last October's election Premier McGuinty promised 'real protection for tenants at all times';

"Whereas our own MPP, Liberal Tony Ruprecht, called for a rent rollback ... at a public event in June 2003;

"We, the undersigned, residents of Doversquare Apartments in Toronto, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately scrap the guidelines and above-guideline increases for 2004, as an elementary gesture of goodwill towards tenants, who voted massively against the Tories in last October's election.

"To shut down the notoriously pro-landlord Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal.

"To abrogate the Tory 'Tenant Protection Act' and to draw up new landlord-tenant legislation in consultation with tenants and housing rights campaigners."

I present this to you, Mr Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004
SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 1, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures / Projet de loi 83, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): The member for—boy it's been a week that I've been away. You've changed your—

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): Beaches-East York.

The Deputy Speaker: Beaches-East York. Thank you.

Interjection: You've changed your seating arrangement.

Mr Prue: Changed the seat, and all things look a little different these days.

It is again a delight to be here to finish my speech. I understand I have some 20 minutes left of my one-hour speech. I want to tell you, though, that it is indeed a difficult speech to make for one hour and to stay on point. I'm going to attempt to do that again, to talk exactly about the budget. The budget is a very long and complex document and the arguments contained within it can be long and complex too.

In fact, when I went last night to a reception held in this august building, one of the members who works for the Liberal Party came up to me—not a member of this House, but a person who is employed by the Liberal Party—and told me quite incredulously, "I listened to your speech for the first 40 minutes of it and you said many good things that are contained in the budget, and yet you don't support us." I think I have to answer him—and I hope he's watching again—as to the reason why.

1520

Yes, there are good provisions in this budget. Nobody in the New Democratic Party will deny even for a moment that the hospitals need more money. We will not deny for a moment that the schools need more money. We will not deny for a moment that it is a good thing that children are given inoculations, because children need to be protected from pneumococcal disease and any number of other things. We will not deny that this government is attempting to redress some of the wrongs that have happened in this province over the last number of years.

All of that will require money; no one will deny that. I will salute for the little bit—I know that'll wind up in a Liberal brochure somewhere. I will salute them for trying to solve the problems that this province has encountered over the last number of years. The problem for New Democrats is not that you are trying to redress the problems; the problem we have with your budget is, quite frankly, how you are going to get the money to pay for that. We believe you are getting the money on the backs of the working poor, we believe you are getting the money on the backs of senior citizens, and we believe that you are getting money from people whose taxes you promised not to raise. That is the problem we have and that's what I want to deal with, primarily, over the balance of the 18 minutes that are left to me.

As I was speaking the other day, I went through a whole list of problems that we see, everything from the tax on the working poor, the centrepiece of the budget, being the new health tax. We talked about the choices the Liberals would have.

We talked about the rising cost of licences and fees that the poor, and primarily poorer income earners, are going to have to bear in disproportionate amounts.

We talked about the delisting of tertiary health costs, everything from chiropractic services to optometrists to physiotherapy.

We talked about the child benefit clawback and how the money that was promised to those very poor people is not going to be forthcoming.

We talked about the inadequacy of the 3% welfare increase. Although we welcome any increase at all, as I'm sure those very poor people do, that is simply not adequate given the amount of money they have lost over the years, with a 21% reduction some nine or 10 years ago, compounded by an inflation rate of some 13% since that time. That 3% hardly cuts it.

We talked about the child care provisions. There was really no new money for child care, as was included in the Liberals' election promises.

We talked about the sleight of hand of the $3.9 billion that has been moved from the province to the OPG and Hydro debt. That's probably where it belongs, but that took $3.9 billion out of the deficit so that the deficit, which would have been $6 billion, miraculously appears now to be $2.2 billion.

We talked about the four-year fiscal framework and how the money is simply not going to be there.

We talked about education and the capping of class sizes, which is going to eat more than half of the new budgeted monies, monies which Rozanski himself did not recommend.

We finished off the other day by talking about the little kernel that was thrown out at the last minute by the finance minister on continuing to look at the potential privatization of the LCBO. Although he says he's not going that way, he has left the door open, which we think is very sad.

Last but not least, we talked about municipalities, the 2% of the gas tax and the one cent that is coming this year, which is a good thing. We will say right out that that is a good thing. We were also talking about how the infrastructure monies are not adequate.

That takes me, with the 15 minutes left, to several other items which I think need to be dealt with in this speech. The first is housing. If there is one element in this budget that has been neglected, that has been left out, that has been short-shrifted, it is the entire area of the housing portfolio. The Liberals promised that they would build 20,000 units of affordable housing. The Liberals promised, prior to election day, that they would build 6,000 units of supportive housing, primarily for people who had substance abuse and/or psychiatric problems, those people who make up the overwhelming majority of those we call homeless in this province, to help get them off the street.

If you look at the budget, quite sadly, there is very little money here: depending on how you read it, $18 million in money, or $13 million, because $5 million of it has already been spent. I want to tell you, it is impossible to build the number of units that the Liberals promised, and the number of units that we know we need in this province, with the $13 million.

In the city of Toronto alone, there are 65,000 to 70,000 families on the list for affordable housing, who can wait up to 14 years to get the housing for them and their children, often only to find that the children have grown, have left home, and that they're no longer eligible. We know that people wait literally for years and years, living in squalor. They could really help themselves, their families, their children, their education, their lifestyle, if only they could get into clean, affordable housing.

We have a government here today that promised, while they were in opposition, that they would abide by, and work with, their federal Liberal cousins in Ottawa. Those same federal Liberal cousins have given $67 million to Ontario. But that has to be matched, it has to be matching funds, and we see in this budget that those matching funds are not forthcoming. If they were, if there was another $50 million in this budget for something I think almost everyone would agree we need—affordable housing for our poor, for our destitute, for those who are homeless on the streets—then quite frankly that would be matched by federal dollars to the tune that there would be $134 million. That would be enough to build a lot of housing.

As it exists now, with $13 million this government can build 520 units of affordable housing. That is it—520 units. That is on a matched dollar-by-dollar basis. If it were only up to them, and if there were no federal contribution, you would be looking at 260 units across the length and breadth of this great province. That is woefully inadequate.

Another thing that is in the budget, or not in the budget, to be more correct, is the whole provision for shelter allowances. This government campaigned on one of their 231 recommendations to institute immediately a provision for shelter allowances so that the working poor could afford the rents that were charged, particularly in the large cities of Ottawa, London, Hamilton, Toronto, Windsor and Thunder Bay. Those are nowhere to be seen. It is totally not mentioned and it is, I suggest, a huge failing in the housing portfolio. There are some 12 to 14 ministries that we know are not going to get any increase at all, including this one—ministries that need the money, ministries that cannot operate without the money and ministries that are going to see in the next year their actual source of revenues dry up, their workers disbanded and the provisions that people rely on in this province completely obliterated.

We have the whole problem, too, of child care. We've seen that they have finally been willing to pass on federal dollars for child care which have been sitting there for a long time and have not been spent. We know that those monies in part have been freed up, but certainly not enough of them, and that there is still some $130 million sitting in a kitty, which the federal government has promised and delivered, and which this provincial government has refused to spend in the area for which it has been earmarked.

The Liberals' own plans that they put forward in the last election have come to naught.

1530

We know from this bill that there are other problems. It was only yesterday that, in still reading this budget bill—because it is voluminous and there is so much in it—we discovered that there is a provision that within municipalities, new businesses will be forced to pay higher taxes than existing businesses when they move into a business district within a city.

What that means in my own municipality of Toronto, in my own riding of Beaches-East York, is that when a person decides to set up a new business and moves into that new business, they will not have the opportunity the older businesses have to have their tax increases phased in over a number of years, but they will immediately have to pay the higher and new tax as it exists at the time the business is opened.

Therefore, a restaurant opening up diametrically across the street from an existing restaurant will expect, and must expect, that the taxes they will pay on that commercial development will be higher than their competitor's. What that means, quite frankly, is that business-

people, people trying new enterprises, small enterprises, family enterprises, will be forced to pay the higher rate. It will doom them in a competitive way against the people with whom they're doing business, and I would think it is patently unfair and it does not make good economic or budget sense of this government. We should be encouraging people to open new businesses, not discouraging them by forcing them to pay higher taxes than their competitors. And should this budget go out to committee and should we hear deputations, clearly this is a provision the government should look at.

We want—we need—new business in this province, particularly small business. We want our cities, our towns, our countryside, our tourist areas, to be vibrant and competitive. We want new restaurants. We want new stores. We want new services. And in order to get those, we have to encourage the people willing to take the risks to put up their financial monies, and give them the same provisions as existing services. If we do not do that, we cannot expect them to come, we cannot expect them to invest and, quite frankly, we cannot expect that our tourism industry will increase and get back to its pre-SARS days.

We see the problem as well about the delisting. Yesterday there was quite a kerfuffle in this House when my colleague the member from Toronto-Danforth asked a question about the delisting of drugs. I would just like to go over for the record exactly what section 20 of the bill says. Section 20 of the bill allows for the minister, and the minister alone—not the cabinet, not the Lieutenant Governor in Council, no person other than the minister—to delist drugs. He or she is now the only person who is allowed to do so and, in doing that, we look to—well, we're hoping that the minister is very sensitive on this. But we are very afraid on this side of the House of this particular provision because the drugs that can be delisted can be delisted notwithstanding the provisions of, I believe it's section 23 of the act. But they can be delisted for any reason whatsoever that the minister deems appropriate.

We also looked yesterday at another provision, which had heretofore escaped our attention, and that is under the Tenant Protection Act. I have to say that this government has some of the best bald-faced luck in the history of any government of this province. You are blessed—totally, completely blessed—with a situation in which vacancy rates in the province of Ontario are going up and, in part, in some places, where rents have actually declined modestly, and I would say very modestly, $5 to $10. We're not talking very much, but at least modestly in the last year or so in places such as Toronto. It has not declined in any way near that in other cities like Ottawa or Hamilton or Kitchener, but we do see $5 to $10 rate reductions in the city of Toronto.

Having said that, the reason in part for this decline is that the number of people who are doubling up in rental units has reached an all-time high. There was a reception here last night put on by the rental housing providers in the legislative dining room. I think many of the members may have attended it, and some of those people came to me and attributed the increase in rental units that are now for rent to the fact that people are doubling up.

People who used to be able to afford a rent of $500 or $600, and there are no units available to do that any more, are finding they are required to have roommates. They're renting a two-bedroom unit at $1,000 or $1,100, and that is why some of the rental units, the one-bedroom units that were once fully booked, are now finding their way on to the rental market. That, in and of itself, is probably the major criterion for the number of units that remain vacant in many of our cities here today.

Notwithstanding that, this government has not spent the amount of money, as I alluded earlier, on new housing. Quite frankly, housing is needed at the lower end of the scale, for people who can only afford $400 to $500 or $600 a month for rent. That is really where the new housing is needed. This government has sufficient monies only for 260 units, 520 if they are co-funded, and they have promised 20,000 units, plus $100 million for shelter allowances, which unfortunately did not find its way into the budget as well.

To conclude, and it's been a rather long hour, we think some of the provisions of this budget are laudatory. We particularly think the money being spent on our schools and our hospitals is necessary. We believe immunization of children is something that is long overdue, particularly for meningococcal diseases, and would salute the government's action.

But we cannot and will not be supporting this bill, because we consider it to be regressive. It is not what is being done; it is how the money is being spent to make the possible happen. We believe it is unfair to working families. We believe that working families, senior citizens, those on limited income, are being forced to pay disproportionate amounts of their limited income toward a budget, while other people who are much better off—corporations that make billions of dollars, like the banks in this province—get off relatively scot-free.

A corporation like the Bank of Montreal, which made $602 million in the last three months in this province and in this country, pays absolutely nothing toward the health care premium. In fact, it's even worse than that, because the provisions of this budget allow that there be a tax reduction, if not immediately, at least phased in between now and the year 2012, that will let the banks pay less and less, while ordinary citizens on limited incomes, on fixed incomes will be forced to pay more and more.

Not only will they have to pay for their share of the health levy, they'll have to pay more money for licence fees, fees for birth certificates, fishing licences and 50 or so other government services. They will have to do that at a time when hospital provisions and doctors' provisions are delisted: physiotherapy, optometrists and the like.

They will have to do that while the child clawback does not give any kind of money that was promised to them. The money that is put forward by the federal government would give $2,800 a year to a family with

two children and they're being asked to accept, by this government, $89, about 3% of what the federal government makes available to this province.

They're going to have to pay all of that extra money, if they have children in school, to see the provisions of the Rozanski report not followed, because Rozanski recommended some $2 billion in improvements that were necessary to bring the schools up to par, to the way they were in the early 1990s. Although this government did put forward $850 million, only $430 million of it is going toward those recommendations Mr Rozanski made in his quite brilliant report earlier this year.

The rest of the money goes also for a laudable goal, of reducing class sizes, but it is something that is being undertaken too soon, before the major problems have been solved. We ask that this budget bill go out to committee. We think the people of Ontario will have a lot to say. I would welcome it if this government would have the intestinal fortitude to hear what the people actually have to say, and take this from city to city to listen on how to make it better.

Thank you very much.

1540

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for—these seat changes aren't helpful to me—Etobicoke North.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I would like to, first of all, commend and actually quote some of the remarks from the MPP for Beaches-East York. He said, quite rightly, "some of the provisions of this budget are" quite "laudatory,... we ... salute the government's action." I would also like to forewarn him that they may likely appear on a brochure or two, time going forward.

Having said that, a lot of details have been floated around: billions here, hundreds of millions, thousands of individuals covered and so on.

I want, for a moment, to take it down to the level of one particular individual who had one particular problem. A constituent of mine in Etobicoke North came to see me, an individual, unfortunately, who was suffering from kidney failure because of long-standing diabetes. Of course, this is a life-threatening condition for which dialysis, or kind of the plugging into a hospital machine for three hours at a time, two to three times a week, is required to sustain life. This individual was unable to access this particular service within my own riding and had to go elsewhere at considerable time, suffering, expense and, really, challenge.

With this particular budget, among all the flurry of numbers, one of the things that we are going to do is allow individuals such as this fellow, and something on the order of maybe 15,000 to 20,000 more kidney failure patients, to actually access 500,000 sessions of dialysis on an annual basis. This is just one small but very meaningful example or application of where the health care premium dollar is going to be spent judicially, with results and with overall benefit to the province of Ontario.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my pleasure to offer comments on the comments made by the member for Beaches-East York on the budget motion. He talked about taxes, and in this budget there are some 50 tax increases. I think that's worth noting, in light of the fact that the Premier did sign a very public document saying he wouldn't increase taxes. In fact, we have this one huge tax increase, the new health premium, which is going to be a very significant burden on working families.

For the people of the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, there was a bit of a surprise on page 96 of the budget paper. In the very back of the budget paper there's one line and it says, "We propose to return the definition of northern Ontario, for the purposes of government policy and program delivery, to what it was before September 2000."

This, in my mind, is a mean-spirited and partisan move on the part of the government. It's mean-spirited because it's going to adversely affect the people of Muskoka, and it's partisan because, I think, if I was a Liberal member of Parliament, the government would not have made this move. When you look at the bare facts, when you look at Statistics Canada from 2001 and you look at the median family income for the area that the Minister of Northern and Development and Mines represents, what does it say? It says median family income, all census families: $56,165. If you look at the median family income, the same stats from Statistics Canada 2001 for Muskoka: $50,713—some $6,000 less for the Muskoka area.

It's quite obvious from these statistics that there are no socio-economic justifications. People in Muskoka have a right to know why the government is making this move. They have a right to have some consultation happen with the government, a government that says it's open and honest and is trying to be transparent about things. I think they deserve to have some consultation and an explanation for why the government is making this mean-spirited, partisan move.

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm very pleased to rise and comment on the very specific and articulate comments made by my colleague for Beaches-East York. I can tell you, as I listened to the things he's had to say, that a lot of it resonated with me. It resonated with me particularly because many of the issues that he raised in terms of his criticism of this budget came up before the budget had even been tabled by the government, and they came up in the by-election in Hamilton East. He was there with me, I'm pleased to say, knocking on doors in Hamilton East and talking to members of the Hamilton East riding. They talked about a lot of concerns he has raised in his opportunity to debate this budget, this bill. What they talked about was a fear and a concern that the working people of this province were going to be unjustly burdened with fixing some of the problems we have. In fact, my colleague has outlined just how much this budget is about injustice for people who are unable to afford the kind of tax hikes that were foisted on them and the fact that the budget is short on fairness and high on unfairness.

It's really quite interesting to listen, from my perspective, being the most recently elected person to this Legislature, to people who are analyzing this bill and bringing to light all of the concerns that I most recently heard on the doorstep. I want to laud him and his very methodical review of the issues that are of concern to working families, low-income families and, quite frankly, communities at large from one end of this province to the other. He's done an excellent job. I believe the government needs to sit up and take notice and in fact take this bill out to the people of Ontario and have full debate from one end of this province to the other.

The Deputy Speaker: Further questions and comments? The member for Lambton—

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): How about Huron-Bruce?

The Deputy Speaker: Just hang on and I will find you. It's a tough day. Huron-Bruce.

Mrs Mitchell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think it's because we changed seats.

It is certainly my pleasure to rise this afternoon and support the budget as presented. It is so important to our rural communities: health care, education and building strong communities. Coming from a rural area, we have been through some very difficult times. Revenue neutrality through all the downloading was especially difficult for our rural municipalities. It has caused great hardships in all of our schools and our health care facilities.

One thing I would like to focus on for just one moment is talking about primary care for the citizens of Ontario. This is especially important in rural communities. We have within our communities generations of families who do not have family doctors. The formula that has been applied throughout Ontario for numerous years does not work. We need to look at how we provide health care in a different way.

I celebrate the primary care reform. It is long overdue. This plan will meet the needs of our rural communities. I can tell you that this is one of the issues I have heard repeatedly within my riding: doctor shortages. "What are we going to do?" This will move the agenda forward to meet the health care needs of my communities, so I am very much in support.

We need new directions, and we will achieve that through this budget. Health care, education, building strong communities—it's long overdue. I celebrate the budget that moves this forward. I know that within my communities, it is strongly supported.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Beaches-East York has two minutes to reply.

Mr Prue: I thank very much the members for Etobicoke North, Parry Sound-Muskoka, Hamilton East and Huron-Bruce for their comments.

I'd like to deal a little bit with each one of them, at least one sentence or so that they had to say.

Interjection.

Mr Prue: I did. I said Hamilton East.

To the member for Etobicoke North, I thank him for his comments. I try as always to be very balanced. I try to say good things and bad things, because everything is not black and white in this House, despite what often happens here. There are provisions of this budget that are good, but I want to tell you that I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind that my comment will some day end up on a Liberal brochure. It has already happened before in Hamilton East, and it will again, I am sure, in Etobicoke North, when the need arises.

The second thing is, I have to tell you that I agree wholeheartedly with the comments of the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka about that wonderful riding. It is in fact a part of northern Ontario. It should remain a part of northern Ontario. I'm not sure exactly how this budget bill fits into that, but I did see quite recently that it has been moved to southern Ontario and, therefore, will lose some of the stature, some of the money it gets. Quite frankly, it is not a rich riding. It is a riding that is well deserved of its northern orientation.

1550

To my new colleague from Hamilton East, her comments were spot-on. I had not spent a lot of time in Hamilton East, I have to tell you quite bluntly, before the by-election, but having gone to that riding, it is quite clear it is a riding that must be among the poorest ridings in this province. It is a riding of many poor and working-class people who struggle to get by. Quite frankly, I can understand how many of them feel about this budget and about the potential of paying more in taxes for health care.

Last but not least, to the member from Huron-Bruce—

Interjection: Time's up.

Mr Prue: My time is up. Your comments on the family doctors were well taken, and I hope the money is directed in that direction.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I just want to say at the outset that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Pat Riley, basketball coach extraordinaire, was asked a couple of years ago by a media person to speculate on how he thought his team was going to do this year. He said to the media person who was interviewing him, "Let me answer your question by asking you a question." Dave Levac will be interested in this because he's a basketball fan. "If you take a fresh orange and you put it in a vice and under enough pressure, what do you get? The media person said, "Well, that's easy, coach. You get fresh-squeezed orange juice," and he said, "That's your answer." With that, he turned and walked away. The media guy scratched his head and said, "Coach, before you go," he said, "Come on back. I've got to tell you, I'm pretty clever, but I didn't quite understand what you meant." He said, "Well, it's simple. The first rule in life is, if you take any individual or team and put them under enough pressure, you very soon find out what they're made of. You find out what's inside."

I want to add to that: If you put enough pressure on a new government, you soon find out what's inside as well.

I want to talk a little bit about what's inside, about the values that I think were an important part of our budget and behind our budget.

We believe, as Liberals, that public service is an obligation, not an option. We believe that strong public services are an obligation we all bear together in this House, not an option.

It's not the member from Hamilton East's health care system, the member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot's health care system or Mr Prue's health care system. The health care system we have belongs to all of us, and we have to stand together with respect to ensuring a strong, vibrant public service in this province. That's our obligation and that's our trust, and that's a value that we on this side of the House hold very dear. I think it was Martin Luther King who said that politics is basically about two things: It's about the values that you would hold self-evident on a good day being translated into social policy, and it's about the kinds of decisions we make about the distribution of goods and services and opportunities.

That said, you know, it wasn't a perfect budget, but we came to power as a new government under less-than-perfect circumstances, and I think everyone would acknowledge that. That's important because that talks to another one of our values: the value of wanting to be consultative, the value of wanting to be inclusive, the value of wanting to be collaborative with Ontarians, to take everything that's right with Ontario, and that's our people, and use that giftedness to fix everything that's wrong with Ontario. So that was another value and it ties in with respect, it ties in with listening, and it ties in with, on balance, trying to find the best way to move forward under very, very difficult situations.

Now, I have to tell you, I was home for constituency week, and it was, to be frank, the week from hell. We got a lot of calls. A lot of people were upset. We got called names in some cases, although about a third of the e-mails and calls we got were very, very positive.

But it reminded me of a story that I want to share with the House—a true story, by the way. When my youngest girl, Whitney, was six, she wanted desperately to go to Disney World. She wanted to go on the ride—I think they call it Space Mountain. Some of you have probably been on Space Mountain. She was all excited about it. She went to school and she drew pictures of this ride at Disney World, Space Mountain, and she said, "Teacher, teacher, in four weeks my dad's taking me to Disney World and we're going to go on Space Mountain." "Teacher, in two weeks we're going to Space Mountain." "Teacher, tomorrow, my daddy's taking me to Disney World and we're going to go on Space Mountain."

Well, I have to tell you, we got to Disney World and we got in line for the ride. We were from about here to the member from up Ottawa way away when the sign came up saying, "Sorry, ride closed for maintenance." So I said to my wife, Barb, "Look, honey, I want to check this out." So I did. I went up to the ride master and said, "Look, you've got a really disappointed little girl here from Canada." He said, "Look, I'm sorry, sir. The simple truth of the matter is this ride's broken and it's dangerous, and if your daughter were to go on this ride we couldn't accept responsibility for what happens to her."

Well, you know what? If I can push this, when we came to government we discovered that the situation in Ontario was a lot like Space Mountain, a lot like that broken ride. I want to tell you, as a responsible parent, I would no sooner have stuck my daughter on an unsafe ride than I would stick any one of our seniors or our disabled or any one of the other people in desperate need of stronger public services into a situation where we're not responding positively and trying to do the right thing.

So our budget worked very much in terms of—

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): That was sweet.

Mr McMeekin: What's that? It was sweet, yes. Thank you. It's a true story too. By the way, as a footnote, four years later we returned to Disney World and we rode on Space Mountain 10 times in a row, and she was the happiest little girl in the world.

Interjection.

Mr McMeekin: Maybe that's prophetic, member from Brant. I think he's picked that up.

I made a number of observations on behalf of my constituents directly to the finance minister that I'd like to share.

I reminded him that no one's ever taxed their way to prosperity and that we need to be about the process of restoring prosperity and public confidence. He worked very, very hard at that.

I suggested to him that what gets measured gets done and that I was very, very concerned that a lot of what we do in government and in public service doesn't get measured, that we need accountability mechanisms and specific, measurable objectives. He responded to that.

I talked about the need, on behalf of my constituents, for a diversified set of health care options, and pointed out that hospital beds cost $800 a day, long-term care $117 and three hours of good, quality home care, as the member for Hamilton East knows, only $50. Yet we've got it sort of backwards. We're letting home care go down the tubes. We responded to that with specific, measurable, identifiable, important initiatives in home care.

I talked to him about the need for a new deal for cities, and I said we need to be bold. It's not enough just to talk about a couple of cents of gas tax; we need to be talking about a permanent commitment of sustainable funding, maybe a cent of the PST or GST in partnership with the federal government down the road, but I acknowledged that that's probably for a future term. I said, "Why don't you look at some kind of Ontario-municipal infrastructure financing authority where we can leverage money to get things done," and he did that.

I talked about the most insidious problem that we have in Ontario, and that's the growing gap between the richest of us and the rest of us, the need to close that. And you know, I have to confess I don't think we necessarily

went far enough, but given the circumstances, forward is better than standing still or reverse. So I think we need to look at that again, but we're moving forward.

1600

I talked about the need to emphasize partnership, working with people, bringing people to the table, that the measure of effective public policy isn't how many people you exclude from the table but how many you can include and how you can take their ideas.

I talked about some new sources of revenue that I was pleased to see the minister embrace, although he didn't embrace all of them, and I'll continue to work on that.

I noted that I was concerned about some potential delistings. In fact, I would have loved to have seen the audiology put back in, but that wasn't to be. But do you know what? If circumstances change federally and there's actually the $3 billion that at least one party is talking about delivering to the provinces, and we get a good hunk of that, perhaps we can revisit that issue.

In closing, I just want to say that our values are very different from the values of the previous government. We moved away from the wrecking ball politics to trying to build a stronger, more vibrant Ontario. We're doing that by telling people the truth, not just what we think they want to hear, and we're doing that every day and in a way that—it's a major restoration project, I've got to tell you—in the long term, we're going to be accountable to the people of Ontario and we're going to restore the strong public services they have come historically to rely on.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak in support of the budget. I know that sometimes when I speak to people in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, or even to some of my colleagues in this room, when we talk about budget and numbers and spreadsheets, our eyes glaze over. But a budget is really about how it will affect each of our lives.

I know the people in the community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore all asked ourselves, will our kids' education improve? Will the schools be at peace? Will our hospitals be there when we need them? Will our public transit be better or worse? Will the air be clean? Will the water be safe to drink? Will our province's fiscal house be in order, because that's the foundation on which we can build all of these things?

I'm proud to stand in support of the budget today, because our first budget, this government's first budget, answers those questions, each and every one of them, with a resounding yes. Yes, our kids' education will improve. Yes, our health care will be there. Yes, our water will be there. Yes, our air will be clean.

This budget followed the most comprehensive public consultations ever conducted by an Ontario government. In the winter of 2004, our government was at a critical turning point. We had arrived in office in October 2003 and had inherited a large structural deficit, which was projected, even after we rolled back the tax cuts and tax credits given by the previous government, to average in excess of $4.5 billion per year, with off-book debt consisting of $2.2 billion.

We knew what we wanted to achieve, what our election mandate was, but how were we going to get there? How fast were we going to go?

To help us answer these questions, we undertook the most ambitious consultation ever undertaken. We spoke to experts, stakeholders, public servants and citizens, and that process provided us with information and resulted in a public document called Trust and Balance. Trust and balance have been the touchstones of how we have chosen to proceed. These consultations formed the basis of our first budget, The Plan for Change, that closely represents the priorities Ontarians identified for us during those consultations.

Our plan is very clear. Ontario must be a leader in economic growth, public services and quality of life. Our budget is the first step in a four-year plan to return Ontario to a position of leadership, a position it once enjoyed. We are committed to balancing the budget in this four-year plan.

Importantly, our plan delivers needed, necessary, urgent change in health care. Ontarians told us, and the people in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, my riding, told me, that health care was their major priority. We listened and we have acted in this first budget.

The improvement and the transformation that we will see in the health care system have only been made possible by the health care premium that is being implemented, based on income. With families with an income level of $21,000, and we don't take for granted the request that we are making to citizens across this province to contribute to the transformation of our health care system, you're being asked to contribute $60 a year. If you make more, if you make $200,000 a year, you are being asked to contribute $900 a year, in addition to the percentage of your income that you already contribute to that.

For that, we are committed to transforming our health care system. We have also committed that every single cent we receive from the premiums will be reinvested back into health, direct health care, front-line programs and new services.

I know sometimes those things seem distant and absent. I want to tell Ontarians, and the people in my riding, what that will mean for them. What will we use that money for? Some 36,000 new cardiac procedures by the year 2007-08—no longer will you have to wait on a long waiting list; 2,300 joint replacements by 2007-08; nine new MRI and CT sites; 9,000 cataract surgeries per year; $600 million to support and reform primary care by 2004-05—as the Minister of Health said today, driving money back into our communities; giving $14 million for community health centres, two of which I have in Etobicoke-Lakeshore—LAMP and Stonegate; providing home care for an additional 95,700 Ontarians by 2007-08; providing end-of-life care for 6,000 Ontarians in their homes by 2007-08; community-based mental health services for an additional 78,600 Ontarians; free immunizations for children across this province, and the list goes on; an immediate increase in public health of $273 million, growing to $469 million by 2007-08.

Those examples will change the way we deal with health care in this province and will provide each of us an opportunity to lead healthier lives.

We also know that it is a priority for those people in Etobicoke-Lakeshore and across the province that we reinvest in public education. In this budget, we are committed over the next four years to investing an additional $2.6 billion in our schools. This is an increase of more than $1,100 per student over the next four years, with a $200-million investment that will leverage an additional $2.1 billion in capital funding to fix our crumbling schools. This investment is a great first start and it's going to help kids get the start they need in our schools; and funding our major commitments to reduce class sizes in JK to grade 3 to 20, funding training spaces for 1,000 new teachers in 2005-06 and making sure that there are head teachers in every single school to deal with literacy and numeracy.

We're committed to not simply throwing money at the system. We will be monitoring those results. That is also part of the transformation that this budgets brings to education and health care. We're going to monitor results. We're going to look for results. We're not going to brag about the money we are spending; rather, we are going to come to you in four years and tell you what we have achieved with your hard-earned tax dollars. That's what you expect of us and that's what we're committed to. This is the beginning of results-based planning, looking at results instead of expenditures. We need to make sure that we spend tax dollars wisely, and we're committed to that.

Surely everyone in this room knows that a budget is difficult and there are difficult decisions to be made. But I want to highlight just a few more areas that I am proud of in this budget. They are the very things that I was told to do when I came to Queen's Park. People voted for a Liberal government and they supported me because they wanted to see investments in our community and social services. We've given a 3% increase for ODSP and Ontario Works. We've given $7 million to parents through the national child benefits supplement, ending the clawback. We're putting money into children's mental health programs—$25 million. That will very much assist communities in this province dealing with those most difficult issues. We're creating an additional 4,000 daycare spaces across the province.

I want to talk for a moment about what this budget means to seniors. The month we're in, June, is Seniors' Month. This budget talks about a proposed increase to the property tax credit of $125 for seniors with low and moderately low incomes.

Restoring long-term-care standards: What does that mean in practical terms? That means two baths a week and a registered nurse on duty at all times. We are going to have 2,000 new long-term care staff, and 600 of them will be nurses. That's what this budget means to people in this province, to people in my community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

1610

I want to talk about a couple more areas. We were sent here to make sure that our communities would be safe and strong. This budget commits money to public transit—that is something we were sent here to do—with one cent coming this October, 1.5 cents in October 2005, and two cents in October 2006.

This budget also deals with the issue of internationally trained professionals to make sure that those folks who come to our province are given an opportunity to succeed.

When I made my first speech in this Legislature, I talked about the principles that I would be guided by as a member of the provincial Parliament. I told this House that I would be guided by a principle taught to me by one of the mentors in my life, and that is to do what is right, not what is easy.

This budget was not easy. It's a difficult decision. We're going to turn this province around. We're going to transform education and health care. We are going to reinvest in those public services because that is the right thing to do. That's why we've been sent here. This budget is the first step along that path, and we look forward to making sure that this plan comes into implementation in the next four years.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Yakabuski: I want to respond to the comments from the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot and also the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

The member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore talked about the need to reinvigorate the health care system and about the great consultative process that they went through before they came up with this budget. I'd like to know who, at any one of these consultative processes or meetings, brought forth the idea of charging working families in this province health care premiums. Where did that come up in this process?

They're saying they're going to have this many new cardiac procedures as a result of this government. They're going to need those cardiac procedures because you've raised the collective blood pressure of people in this province to such a level that they're going to be in need of cardiac help.

This budget is the bottom. Where it has really bottomed out is in trust. Dalton McGuinty said last fall repeatedly, he said it again in January, he even said it to Graham Richardson in April: "I won't raise your taxes." A blatant broken promise, and that's what has the collective blood pressure of the people of this province rising to unprecedented levels.

They don't believe they can trust the Premier of the province of Ontario, yet they're stuck with him for the next three years because he won't go by the referendum law that he said he'd go by—a referendum if he's going raise their taxes. So where does that put them for the next three years? They're on a dead-end street.

Ms Horwath: I'm pleased to respond to the comments by my former colleague on regional council, the member

for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, as well as the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

I have to tell you that it was pretty startling for me to hear some of the comments, particularly by the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, having served with him on regional council in the city of Hamilton—he as the chair, while I was vice-chair, in the area of social services and public health. He knows very well the effect of this budget on people in the Hamilton area, particularly Hamilton East. In fact, he was indicating to me earlier across the House that he quite understands that the people in the riding I represent are some of the lowest-income people in all of Ontario. It becomes even more disturbing, then, to hear that there's a pride, a sense of accomplishment, understanding that these very people are the ones who are going to be hurt the most by this budget and that it is these people who are being asked to pay more out of their pockets for services like chiropractic, optometrists and things like that, things that people cannot afford.

It's funny, because I can recall fighting with him on the same side on issues of maintaining a proper level of home care funding in the city of Hamilton, and I can recall watching as previous governments took away funding for things like dental care and watching the poor people in our community have rotting teeth. I'm afraid that we're going to have people in the city of Hamilton who are going to be walking our streets unable to see because they won't be able to afford vision care. That, quite frankly, is unacceptable.

It's also interesting to hear that there are people who think that the right thing to do—as was mentioned by the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, and perhaps it's right for her riding—is to actually charge people who are least able to pay for the services. The right thing is that the people who should be paying are the ones who have the means to pay. That's not what this budget is about. It's about the opposite.

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I want to congratulate my colleagues on their speeches, but I want to raise the issues that were brought forward by my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. When you juxtapose the two Liberal speeches and his speech, you find an interesting parallel there. On the one hand, we had two of our members speak eloquently about the types of services that are going to be provided by this budget and the reason we have health premiums. Yet on the other side all we heard was: "Taxes are wrong. We need to cut taxes. We need to balance the budget."

Today we've seen the true face of the Conservative Party. We've seen a party that's against immunization for our children. We've seen a party that's against investing more in terms of home care. We've seen a party that is quite content to have long lineups in terms of joint replacement surgery, in terms of people who need a cardiac bypass.

This is the agenda of the Conservative Party. It's interesting that they never want to talk about the substance of the budget. The reason the members of the Conservative Party don't want to talk about it is because they know that after eight years of neglect the types of services that Ontarians demand are going to require some investment. You're not going to be able to take money out of thin air. They want to continue cutting—cutting taxes, cutting programs—so that our institutions can crumble. Do you know what their answer to it was in the election? "Let's build more private schools and let's introduce two-tier health care," because at the end of the day no one in Ontario who can afford it is going to want to go to our public schools or a health care system under a Tory government.

We've come in and we are reversing that trend. Is it going to take revenues? Yes, it is. That's an honest truth, that's an honest fact, and we're going forward and asking Ontarians to help invest in the future of this province. What Ontarians have said to me and to all the members is, "It ain't popular, but do you know what? If we have to do it, we're going to do it."

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's always a pleasure to rise. Again, I'd like to speak on Bill 38 and make some comments here as well, because there's no question that I enjoyed the comments from the member from Kitchener Centre. But I have to point out to him that some of the working families do like something in their pockets. I don't know if you understand what's actually happening out there to your party and to your federal Liberals, but there's an anchor around Paul Martin's neck—I don't know if you know that or not—and it's called Dalton McGuinty. He has basically destroyed the federal government, a guy who came in last year, Mr Paul Martin, with 51% of the support and now this anchor named McGuinty is around his neck.

Has anybody seen the Toronto Sun today? Mr Speaker, you've probably had an opportunity to see it. But the anchor is right there: Dalton McGuinty—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe North, please put the paper down.

Mr Dunlop: Sorry. But the fact of the matter is, Mr Speaker, he is an anchor.

People hate this budget. You can talk all you want about the few little positive things that are in it. The negative things are that you're taking money out of people's pockets. It's as plain and simple as that. When you're taking $1,200 from an average family in Ontario, that's money they're not going to spend on a car or maybe on a vacation for tourism or possibly a new kitchen stove or refrigerator. That money's gone, and that's going to cost jobs. I know you don't understand it. You've never understood it. You think that if you keep raising taxes like you did the last time in David Peterson's government, that's the way to go. But you drive the economy into recession. That's what this bill is going to do. That's why we will do everything we can to stop it. We will never support any one part of this particular bill because of that.

This has become an anchor around the citizens of Ontario. Worst of all, in this unbelievable election going on, we've seen an amazing change here because some of

the same people who are providing information and guidance to Paul Martin are now providing information and guidance to Dalton McGuinty, the anchor around Paul Martin's and the citizens of Ontario's necks.

1620

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot has two minutes to reply.

Mr McMeekin: I want to thank my good friends from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Kitchener Centre, Simcoe North, and particularly my good friend from Hamilton East.

Friends can tell each other the truth, not just what they want to hear, and I always appreciate that. The simple truth is, we found ourselves in one hell of a condition when we came into government. We did what we knew was right. We went back and consulted with Ontarians, because we want to spend dollars wisely and we want to be accountable.

We had some choices to make. We chose to shorten wait times for cancer and cardiac care, for joint replacement and cataract surgery and for MRI and CAT scans. We chose to hire 8,000 more full-time nurses and provide home care for an additional 95,000 Ontarians. We decided to add 3,700 more long-term-care beds and 150 new community-based, multidisciplinary health care centres that will provide 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week care.

In conclusion, our new government has made decisions based on a core set of values: values we shared during the election campaign, and values we know, from our post-election consultation with Ontarians all across this great province and our 63,000 civil servants—for the first time in Ontario history, actually asking our civil servants what they thought and what advice they could give us. We know that the values we're talking about are reflected across this province. Our values do this simple thing: They declare that we're in this together and that we need to look out for each other's kids and take care of each other when someone's sick. Why? Because we value and support one another in this great province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Yakabuski: The Liberal members have referred a couple of times in their addresses to "the truth." There is an old saying that the truth is the first casualty in war. Apparently it's the first casualty after the election of a Liberal government as well, because they just haven't come clean and they haven't stuck to their promises.

I want to commend the members of the Liberal party on the other side of the House for the stiff upper lip and the resolve they've shown in defending this document that is basically worthless, and the spin they've tried to put on it. A story in the Toronto Star—a great paper, by the way—was telling about how they were instructing the Liberals how to behave with regard to dealing with the public furor with respect to this budget and how to respond to the anger out there. So they were getting their spin lessons.

There's also an old saying that baloney is baloney, no matter how you slice it. So that's what they've got to deal with here. They haven't got much to work with. They called this an historic budget, one of the most important budgets in the history of Ontario. That's something they did get right, because this could go down as the first provincial budget in history that will actually spell the demise of a federal government. We're seeing more evidence to that effect every day: that this budget is the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back with regard to Paul Martin's government.

My colleague from Simcoe North talked about an anchor. An anchor can be a good thing and it can be a bad thing. Sometimes we refer to an anchor as something that you hitch your boat to in times of trouble so that you'll be safe during the storm. We've had anchors such as that, like Mike Harris, who went to the people and told them exactly what he was going to do and he did just that. He did just that. Then you've got an anchor like the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty; an anchor that is holding the good ship Liberal at the dock of despair. It can't even get off its moorings to get its election plan going, because there is the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, sinking the ship before it gets out of the dock.

Interjection.

Mr Yakabuski: We'll get one of those, too.

We have Liberal members who want to distance themselves from this budget, at least at times, and then, when they get reined in by the powers that be—the whip and the leader—they get back in line. I just want to talk to you about a couple of them here. The member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh said he wasn't happy with the budget. "I'm not happy with certain things in the budget," he said, "but it's a good budget. We had some difficult choices to make." The member from Ottawa-Orléans called the budget brutal.

The member from Niagara Falls demanded that McGuinty restore coverage for the health care services he slashed. The Minister of Children and Youth Services will be fighting to lower those health care premiums. They're not happy with that budget over there either. They're not happy, because they're getting it in spades in their ridings about what this is doing to working Ontarians in the province. They're getting it in boxcar letters. People are saying, "You told us you would do this and you told us you would do that, but you told us you wouldn't raise our taxes and you told us you wouldn't run a deficit."

Premier McGuinty had a meeting with the Ottawa Citizen editorial board in September, and they asked him point-blank, "What will you do?" because he said in that meeting that the Tories are lying about a $2-billion deficit. I withdraw that; I'm sorry. Certainly Tories wouldn't be doing that anyway. That's what the Premier said. He used the word to the Ottawa Citizen editorial board.

They asked him, "Well, if that is the case, will this change what you plan to do, Mr McGuinty?" "No, no. We will have to work within our means. We must live

within our means. We have to show an example. So we will not be raising taxes, and we will not run a deficit." The day before that he had signed the taxpayer protection pledge, in which he guaranteed to the people of Ontario that he would abide by the terms of that pledge.

People are just livid out there. They're walking around saying, "Have we been hoodwinked. Have we been duped." I was walking on Spadina this morning. I went by this office building and there was a sign on it. It said, "Don't use this door." I looked at that sign and I said, "Now, that's a very definitive sign. I can't be confused by that. It's not saying, 'We'd really like if you would use the other door,' or 'We have a suggestion that this is not a good door to use.'" It was definitive: "Don't use this door."

That's how definitive Dalton McGuinty was last fall: "I won't raise your taxes. I will balance the budget. I won't run a deficit." He was definitive, but then, all of a sudden, he got wishy-washy and willy-nilly and he's all over the map. He's saying one thing and doing another. I'll tell you, the people of Ontario don't like that kind of behaviour. They believe that someone should be good for their word. If you're not good for your word, you're not much good.

Interjections.

Mr Yakabuski: They're going on and they're going on. Paul Martin out there—well, I tell you, talk about a fish out of water. He really enjoyed being the finance minister, I think about eight years ago, but now that he's the Prime Minister campaigning for re-election and he's got the weight of Dalton McGuinty on his shoulders, he is not a happy camper—not at all.

But the anger out there is about the broken promises. Where are we going to end up with this insatiable addiction to taxes that this government has? They're addicted to taxes. Do you know what? They won't be changing their tune, and where is that going to put us in four years? What is that going to do to the Ontario economy? Because when there's a problem and they've got a revenue situation, their answer is going to be, "We've got to solve that by taking more money out of the pockets of hard-working Ontarians." It's not going to work. Those pockets are getting bled dry. There's nothing left there.

1630

So they're going to, again, tax them more. More people will be out of work. More people will have no money to spend. They're saying it's a little bit of an OHIP premium. What do you tell somebody when their property taxes have gone up, their income taxes have gone up, their insurance rates have gone up, their hydro rates have gone up, all as a result of this government? And now you're going to tell them, "You've got to dig deeper again, because we're charging you for health care, but in the meantime, we're going to delist some of those services that you need so badly." What does that say to the people?

You know what they feel like? I'm going to draw a little analogy. Here's a little story for you, folks. It's like a man who is courting his intended for months. He's telling her all kinds of things, how it's going to be, life for them together. She's listening and absorbing that, and she's enjoying it.

On October 2, he popped the question to her, and she said yes. He presented her with a beautiful diamond engagement ring. There was only one catch: The following month, that darned ring was on her Visa bill. That's what Dalton McGuinty is doing to the people of the province of Ontario. He's made all kinds of promises and he's making them pay, and pay through the teeth. That is absolutely wrong.

Dalton McGuinty and Paul Martin—you know, Paul Martin is going around saying, "I promise I won't break my promises." It's so ludicrous as to be almost incredible. He's promising now not to break his promises because the credibility of the Liberal Party has been so shattered by Premier McGuinty and Greg Sorbara that the Prime Minister actually has to go and say, "I promise I won't break my promises."

The Deputy Speaker: One second. I'd like to have a little quiet over on this side. Some aren't even in their seats. So please, bear with us and listen to the speaker. Thank you.

Mr Yakabuski: Paul Martin is going on and saying that he believes in integrity in government: "Integrity is important to us." When Paul Martin and Dalton McGuinty say they believe in integrity, to me that's like Liz Taylor saying, "I believe in 'till death do us part.'" So now they've made all their promises, they've presented the budget, and the people of Ontario are very upset.

I want to talk a little bit about promises. The member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot spoke a little earlier about taking his kids to Disney World. Well, I have children too, and I don't know how many times my children have said to me, "Dad, will you do this? You've got to promise me. You have to promise me you'll do this or you've got to promise me you'll do that or you'll get me this or you'll take me there." I've always said to them, "Look, I can't promise you, but I'm going to do my best, because promises are meant to be kept." I hope—I really do, for the sake of the McGuinty children—that he has taken a different approach to keeping promises to his kids than he has to the people of the province of Ontario.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about some of the real effects of this budget. I have a letter from a lady in Deep River in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke:

"I am writing and begging you to please reconsider our need of the chiropractic service. I visit the chiropractic service twice a week because I need it badly. Without it, I feel I would be in a wheelchair and unable to do anything. I see so many people who visit the chiropractor and get so much help. Now I hear that our visits are not going to be covered.

"I'm asking you and the government to really reconsider this, as so many people will lose so much. For myself, I've tried physiotherapy, pills, all kinds of visits

to hospital, plus two months of therapy in Ottawa, and I had to return to chiropractic care, as none of the other treatments worked or helped at all.

"So please reconsider this and let us keep our OHIP for partial coverage of our costs to visit the chiropractor.

"For the good of myself and all others who really need it."

These are the kinds of things, the kind of pain this budget is inflicting on the people of Ontario. Hard-working families who need these services are being told, "I'm sorry, but we're cutting back," families who are already paying the extra bills this government has brought on by some of its measures. Over $9 billion is the net effect of this budget, out of the pockets of hard-working Ontarians.

An editorial in the Pembroke Daily Observer—I've got to flip through some papers here to find some stuff. Do you know what they call this? If you're doing an interview on radio and there's a time when nothing's happening, they call that dead air. For the first seven months of this government, that's pretty well what we got from it: dead air. It was doing nothing. The first meaningful thing it did was to present this budget, which basically was like taking a baseball bat to the people of Ontario, knocking them unconscious and then emptying their pockets while they were out.

I have to put my glasses on for this one: "As if breaking 250 election promises wasn't bad enough, this bunch proceeds to tell us it's for our own good when they put their grubby hands out for $9 billion in new taxes. And make no mistake, all these fees and premiums are nothing more than taxes from the government that was elected on a promise of no new taxes."

Now he tells us, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty is now among those casting a sceptical eye at Paul Martin. Oh yes, he's now saying that Paul Martin's promises were just delivered in the heat of a campaign and they really don't mean anything. People don't really listen to those promises, he's sort of insinuating at this point. Well, they certainly listened to his promises last September.

There are some parts of this budget that, if delivered properly, will have some benefits. But the net effect of this budget is an unmitigated disaster because of the pain being inflicted on the people of Ontario.

I have travelled the riding extensively since then. I was at the Normandy 60th anniversary that they celebrated in Cobden last Saturday, and I'm going to tell you that veterans, seniors, who served their country are so disgusted by what this government has done to seniors with this budget. I'm just as unhappy. How do you tell people who've put their lives on the line so that we would be able to have elections in this country—you're now telling them, "You know what? I'm not done with you, sir, because there are still a couple of coins in your pocket and I'm going to get them before I'm done."

I'll tell you, Mr Speaker, under these circumstances, I am moving adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1639 to 1709.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will stand, please. Thank you.

All those who are opposed will stand and be counted by the Clerk.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 9; the nays are 39.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has the floor.

Mr Yakabuski: One of the things we're trying to do here is convince this government that we need public hearings on this bill so that the people of Ontario have the opportunity. They're saying they think they know what the people want. Give the people the opportunity to state that. They said they consulted on this budget. Give the people of Ontario the opportunity to confirm or say they are wrong. That's what we are asking for here.

I have got letter upon letter from constituents in my riding who are just sickened by what this budget is doing to them and their ability to meet their daily expenses and the cost of raising their children in this province. They are extremely upset.

I was talking to a constituent of mine who told me to go ahead and use his name, Tony Bleskie. He moved back to Barry's Bay because he wanted to retire. But do you know what? He told me that as a result of this budget he can't retire. He has to continue working, at least part-time, to pay the bills he is faced with now because of the measures in this budget. That's the kind of damage this budget is doing to the people of Ontario.

Let's talk about it. Let's have these hearings. In light of the fact that this government has shown no interest to this date in holding those hearings, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1713 to 1743.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the House.

All those in favour will stand and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

All those opposed will stand and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 7; the nays are 35.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has the floor.

Mr Yakabuski: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will wrap up here in the next minute or so.

In light of the fact that this government doesn't want to consider public hearings on this budget, and we'd like to see the people have input again into the travesty that this budget is, the other option would be if they—if memory serves me correctly, in the early 1980s, maybe 1980 or 1981, Allan MacEachen, the federal Liberal finance minister, tabled a budget that met with such fierce opposition from the public that they actually went back and reworked it, because it was an absolute crime. Well, this budget falls into the same category. So the other option for this government would be to take it back.

Interjections.

Mr Yakabuski: It's worse. Take it back and redo it. Do it over; maybe you'll get it right.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Prue: I have had an entire hour to think about what the member was saying, with lots of time in between to think about his words of wisdom. I want to tell you that throughout the entire hour the member did have one cogent and important thing to say; that is, that the people need to be consulted on this budget. We would welcome this government's going out to the people on this very important budget debate. I know many of you on the other side have said you consulted many times in advance. You held these little pseudo-meetings with people, with pre-arranged decisions they could make and advice they could give you. But the reality is that in their wildest imaginings the people never dreamed for a moment—nor did you put before them—that you were going to have this regressive health tax put upon them.

I think you really need to go out and hear what the people have to say. I am convinced that if you do that, if you even do a few days of hearings at Queen's Park, if you travel anywhere across the province, you will find that people are very upset with this budget. It is not too late for you to withdraw one or two of the measures, including the regressive health tax.

I would agree—and I've said to you before—there are things you are doing in this budget that are important and that need to be done, but the way you collect the money is not the right way. Think about it, listen to the people, and if you need go back to them, if you need to do it through progressive taxation, if you need to tax the banks and those who can afford it, I am sure the people will agree with you. But, please, do them the honour, give them the opportunity to advise you, because you should always believe in the wisdom of the people. If you neglect the people, if you do not hear them, if you run contrary to what you promised them, then as politicians we are all diminished.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I'm glad to have an opportunity to respond to the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. I want to tell him that this budget is based on integrity. It doesn't have the bogus numbers that the previous budget—the Magna budget—had. That budget was based on what I would call—they cooked the books. After eight years of unprecedented economic growth in this province, we found ourselves in a deficit of $6.2 billion. Why did that happen? Because they were able to hide those numbers.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Di Cocco: I say to you that this budget looks at what we need to do to restore core services, even though, when they left office, we found that the cupboard was bare and we had a deficit of $6.2 billion. But they used hundreds of millions of dollars on partisan advertising to tell the public that they were doing a good job. In fact, the books did not reflect it. They sold the 407, and they didn't put in there the fact that they were going to have huge losses of revenue. No, Speaker, they didn't.

All I know is this: The public will not be lured into listening to the simplistic spin of the opposition, but they will judge us over the long haul based on the results we're going to achieve, the better management we're going to initiate, more transparency and accountability, and good government, where decisions are based on the public interest and overall public good. That's the foundation of this budget.

1750

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): There's an old saying, "More gall than a canal horse," and it aptly describes Liberal members who get up here and talk about honesty and integrity. As even the Toronto Star said today, they have lost the moral high ground with respect to what has happened in this budget and the fact that Mr McGuinty has broken so many promises, especially core promises that got that government elected. So for any of them to stand up here and talk about integrity and honesty when they said they would have a referendum if they were going to increase taxes—putting this whole deficit question aside—they're not doing it, and they have no justification for that.

I want to compliment the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, who is a great addition to this assembly, a fine addition, and an outstanding representative not only for his riding but for all of the people of eastern Ontario. So, sir, I compliment you on your presentation here this evening.

Just laying out the facts: We talk about consultation. They consulted their friends and they called that a consultation. Well, we know what has happened with the polls. How accurate was that consultation with their Liberal friends? About 4% of the people of Ontario, according to that poll, support this budget. That was quite a consultation when you came back and said, "We have widespread support for doing what we're doing." Did you talk to them about significant increases to their taxes? No. Did you talk about further breaking of your promises and your sacred pledges? Did you talk to Ontarians about the Premier swearing an oath on the Bible when he came into the executive council as the Premier of the province and then breaking that oath that he swore on the Bible? That is completely shameful.

Giving out cabinet secrets: The Premier has even publicly admitted he did that. He shared cabinet document

secrets with his Liberal friend Prime Minister Martin. That's shameful, and he should resign.

Ms Horwath: My colleague was commenting that the most important piece of the comments that were made by the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke was the discussion about the lack of consultation on this budget, and in fact that's true. That was a very important part of the remarks that were made. However, I would say the other very important part of the comments that were made by the member were around the fact that this budget is being brought down on the backs of working families and low-income people in Ontario, and I can tell you that those are the people I represent in the riding of Hamilton East.

I have to say, as I listened to the comments about this budget in my first opportunity to be participating in a debate on a bill—it's very opportune that it's the budget bill, but the thing that's not opportune, in fact the thing that's a bit of a travesty from my very personal perspective, is that this debate couldn't have occurred prior to the by-election being called in Hamilton East. That is a shame. In fact, it's really a travesty, because had those people in Hamilton East seen what was in this budget prior to having the opportunity to vote, I'm quite sure the wide margin I received in the by-election would have been expanded and may have made history on more than the one or two counts that we already have.

I'm looking forward to my opportunity to make some remarks on this budget myself within the next few minutes, but I do have to say that I find it interesting, as a new member in this Legislature, to have to agree with some of the comments being made by the opposition, because, quite frankly, I had some concerns when they were in government.

I was really shocked to have seen the budget that came down from the government. I really was quite shocked to see the things that were in there, and I will be expanding on them in my opportunities to discuss it further in debate. However, it was a frightening budget. It is scaring the heck out of people in Hamilton East and all across Ontario. Federal Liberals are hearing about it.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has two minutes to respond.

Mr Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments of the members from Beaches-East York, Sarnia-Lambton and my colleagues from Leeds-Grenville and Hamilton East. My colleague from Leeds-Grenville is very passionate about this and other subjects and a tremendous leader in our party.

One of the reasons this budget is causing such a stir is the sense of betrayal out there among the people of Ontario, and that is what hurts the most. They placed their trust in the Liberal Party last October 2. They went to the polls and voted them in. They now feel it was a complete election under false pretences, that this government, the government of today, had no intention of following through with what it promised to the people of Ontario. They voted for them under those circumstances. They didn't give anybody a blank cheque; it wasn't a carte blanche. It was, "We're supporting you because you have put forth a platform and the program of promises that we're identifying with. We're accepting that platform."

But you've turned around and done a 180, and the people will not forgive that. They're about to take their anger out on the federal Liberals. They're about to wipe that saccharine smile off the face of Paul Martin. They have no option with how they're going to deal with the McGuinty government at this time, but sometime down the road this government is going to pay for what they've done to the people of Ontario because the people of Ontario are going to be paying for the next several years for this budget. But they will have their comeuppance.

The Deputy Speaker: I want to thank the members for letting me get back into the groove today after being away a week at the Indianapolis 500, where the only groove I saw was going in a circle. So thank you for your indulgence.

It being, oh, 6 of the clock and the media is waiting for everyone, this House stands adjourned until 10 of the clock Thursday, June 3.

The House adjourned at 1757.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 3 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 3 juin 2004

The House met at 1000.
Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS AND SECURITY GUARDS AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES ENQUÊTEURS PRIVÉS ET LES GARDIENS

Mr Dunlop moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to amend the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act / Projet de loi 88, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les enquêteurs privés et les gardiens.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr Dunlop, you have 10 minutes to lead off.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm very pleased to have this opportunity this early in the Parliament to bring forward my private member's bill. I want to thank a number of people for that opportunity, including many of the stakeholders.

My private member's bill relates to my critic's position. As you know, I'm the critic for community safety and correctional services. It's an area that I particularly enjoy working with because I have a lot of security and correctional facilities in my area, including the Ontario Provincial Police general headquarters, and I get to work a lot with the OPPA, the correctional facilities and, of course, the Police Association of Ontario. It's an area I believe in very strongly. Although as governments we all have priorities where money should be spent, I'm a person who believes that money has to be spent on law and order as one of the number one areas. Without law and order, we can't have a province with a good education system, a good health care system and all the other services that people in our province expect their governments to provide.

With that, I looked at all the different issues last fall when I was asked to handle this particular portfolio, and I spotted immediately that security guards and private investigators certainly was an area that needed a lot of reform.

I'd like to put on the record a few of the comments I received last fall from the different areas.

One, of course, was from the Police Association of Ontario. I'm very pleased this morning that Bruce Miller, the executive director of the Police Association of Ontario, is in the gallery with us. I'd like to acknowledge Bruce and thank him for his support on this particular bill.

In my time, I want to put this on the record, and a couple of other things as well.

First of all: "The Police Association of Ontario ... was founded in 1933 and is the official voice and representative body for Ontario's front-line police personnel, and provides representation, resource and support for 63 police associations. Our membership is comprised of over 21,000 police and civilian members of police services.

"The Police Association of Ontario promotes the mutual interests of Ontario's front-line police personnel in order to uphold the honour of the police profession and elevate the standards of police services....

"The PAO appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act. Our organization has serious concerns over the lack of regulation of the industry. We believe that private security performs many important functions and as such must be subject to regulations and standards in order to ensure community safety.

"The PAO is concerned with the rapid growth of such an unregulated industry. The private security industry has experienced dramatic uncontrolled growth in the past 35 years, from 4,600 licensed private investigators and security guards in Ontario in 1967 to 28,000 in 2002."

I think those are important things to have on the record—the growth of this industry alone.

Second, I want to point out from the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, again from November of last year, their concerns on the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act. The comment on that is as follows:

"Private security and investigative industries are rapidly expanding and require regulation to ensure that the interests of the public will be adequately served and protected. Untrained persons, unlicensed persons or businesses, or persons who are not of good moral character engaged in the private security, investigative and recovery industries are a threat to the welfare of the public.

"OACP agrees that regulation of licensed and unlicensed persons engaged in the business of private investigations and security guards has not kept pace with the expansion/changes in the industry and totally supports reform to current regulations and legislation.

There is a recognized need to develop minimum provincial standards for the selection and training of all private security officers whether they are proprietary or contract. The development of minimum standards enhances the ability of Ontario companies to protect the province's infrastructure, enables the private security industry to better interact with public safety personnel in reducing and preventing crime, especially in the wake of the new reality of security today, post-terrorism of September 11, 2001."

Following on that, we've seen the report of the inquiry into the death of Patrick Shand, which involved security guards. There are two recommendations I will read that are very important. But I want to point out that the bill is all-encompassing. It covers all the recommendations of the Shand inquiry. I want to point out that I understand the Minister of Correctional Services is intending at some point to bring forth a piece of legislation. I think the Shand inquiry distinctly asked that it be done immediately, and I will put that on record.

The first recommendation on amending the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act:

"The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act ... should be amended to remove the licensing exemption that presently exists for 'proprietary' or in-house security practitioners and members of the Corps of Commissionaires. This amendment will provide for mandatory licensing for all privately employed individuals who, for hire or reward, guard or patrol for the purpose of protecting persons or property in Ontario (security practitioners). This amendment is not intended to affect the regulation of armoured car companies or armoured car personnel."

The rationale for that is: "The current act was passed in 1966." That's almost 40 years ago. "The world and the security industry have changed dramatically since that time. To illustrate, there are now some 50,000 persons employed in the security industry, half of whom are unregulated. Every person employed as a security professional should be licensed by the province. In 1966 most security practitioners were watchmen; today they provide a wide variety of services with significant interaction with the public, especially in shopping malls, hospitals, entertainment venues and other locales."

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The second recommendation is the need for urgent change, and that's clearly identified in the Shand report: "We recommend that the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act (the 'act') be amended as soon as possible."

The rationale for that is: "While it is important that all that stakeholders are consulted, the ministry has had many years to consult. When this act was passed in 1966, John Robarts was the Premier of the province and since that time there have been seven more Premiers." Nothing has been done. "Any remaining consultation process should be expedited so that further delays in amendments to the act are avoided. It seems that the issues should already be well known and the ministry should be able to proceed quickly.

"If there are issues that cannot be resolved in the short term, a phased implementation may be appropriate." I hope everyone will listen to that.

"It is important that the government act quickly, responsibly and diligently."

That basically sums it up. There are 20 other recommendations in this. I know a couple of the speakers today—Mr Runciman, a former Solicitor General, will be speaking to the bill on behalf of our caucus; and I understand Mr Levac, a former critic for community safety and corrections, will also be speaking. But the fact of the matter is that this is a piece of legislation we have put a lot of work into, and I hope people will acknowledge that.

We thank all the stakeholders we've dealt with in trying to provide this bill to the public. We think it's very important to bring it forward. It's a bill that I would love to see incorporated in a government bill, but I think it deserves the opportunity to go to some type of committee hearing, hopefully justice and social policy. This is a bill that will enhance services and community safety here in our great province.

Again, I want to thank the Police Association of Ontario, who are very strong advocates of seeing this bill put forward. As you know, you often see vehicles on the roads of our province, and many times these are security guard types of vehicles. These are not police officers. They are not trained, professional police officers—people who are members of organizations like the Police Association of Ontario and the Toronto Police Service—so it is important that we address this. As I said earlier, it has been since 1966; there's no reason right now for anyone to say the minister will bring this bill forward. We've had almost 40 years to bring bills forward, and I think this bill deserves an opportunity to advance to another level. I'd ask that all members of this House support this and give it a chance to be debated. It's something, along with Mr Wilkinson's Bill 40. Where is Mr Wilkinson? Oh, he's not here today. It's like Bill 40: We support it because it's good for community safety; it's good for the people who protect the people of the province for community safety; and it's good for law and order.

With that, I thank all the members of the House who will be speaking to this. I look forward to it. I can't stay around for all the speeches, but I'll be watching them on my TV screen in my office for a while. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I want to calm the waters for the member opposite and let him know that I, during this private members' time, will be supporting his bill, and to start right off and let him know that I think it's an appropriate bill that needs to be debated and needs to be discussed, and I will encourage my colleagues to support it as well. I will also encourage my colleagues to get it to committee so we can get this done quickly.

Having said that, I want to review a few things for him, and I know he would appreciate this very deeply. One, in 2001, 2002 and 2003, I introduced a bill that would require a minimum level of training and licensing of security guards, and it was considered to be an action bill presented by the Dalton McGuinty team, in opposition at that time. We would require that applicants for licensing as private investigators and security guards have a minimum level of training, to provide what they can and can't do as security guards and that they not have an action of a police officer. We were supported at that time by the police association, the OPPA, the chiefs of police and many of the stakeholders out there—acknowledging the presence of Bruce Miller here with us today. These are other examples of actions we took even before the Shand report.

I would also suggest to you that in terms of what you're asking us to do in the bill, there are some very good ideas here, but I would offer the member some suggestions. I know that he and I spoke about this and that he would be more than willing and likes the idea of it getting to committee so we can write the right bill, the proper bill.

There's an area that I would suggest to him maybe, if he's taking notes: denial of licensing. In the provisions of your bill, there is no denial of licensing. There are opportunities and times when we do not want people to have licences to be security guards because of their particular background. We should be denying them licensing.

How training should be delivered is important for us to get right—those organizations that provide the types of training that we're talking about in this particular field. I'll use a personal example in my riding. Mohawk College, Brantford campus, has over 600 candidates who are studying for this type of opportunity. That type of organization should be able to provide that type of training.

The complaints commission: I recall another bill I introduced in this House to take care of problems that were leaking information from all ministries. This commission, it seems to me right now, with a brief look at what you're asking, is a duplication of the registrar. I'm wondering whether we should even be having the commission you're asking for.

There was another area you struck on that I thought was very creative, and I compliment you on that, and that is where people with disabilities can still enter the field. I think that's an appropriate approach that usually doesn't get looked at, so I compliment the member on that. I think that with a good, solid Ontarians with Disabilities Act, we'd be able to cover that off to ensure that people who have disabilities can still enter that field.

So I am complimentary on some of the areas you're proposing, and I think that in terms of coroner's jury report, some of those things are being dealt with in your bill, and I compliment you on that.

You had some concerns as to whether the government is moving quickly enough on this. Just so we know on the record, on the day the Shand report was released, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services committed to updating the act to improve the regulation of private security guards and investigators in this province. Since that time, we've had the discussion paper issued. I know you're aware of it and you know that those are the questions we're asking within this.

I would also suggest to you that the ministry has taken your bill very seriously, and they're looking at all the points you're raising in terms of what the coroner's report indicated. Also, quite frankly, we're very impressed with the fact that it looks like we're going to get all-party support on updating an act that hasn't been updated since 1966. I don't think there should be any law on the books that hasn't been looked at since 1966. Quite frankly, we need to take a look at that.

I know that you know too that there are some other rules and regulations that exist differentiating between police officers. Inside of that, in my bill I recommended that we take a look at copycat badges, copycat insignia, copycat cars and copycat uniforms; I know my friend opposite in the third party, Mr Kormos, and I have had these discussions in the past, as far back as 2001. And since you've been here a few years longer than me, I believe you probably had that in your mind before, and I think it has been discussed before.

So are we on the right track? Absolutely. Are we doing the right thing by looking at a bill that's going to make things better for us in this province, safer, more secure, because of the things that have happened in the last few years? Absolutely. Will we be supporting this bill? I know I'm going to be supporting this bill, and I make it quite clear all the time that we always include in this a discussion of the safety and security of our citizens.

One last point I would like to make to him: We had examples several times that I brought up in 2001. We literally had security guards in their cars, with their flashing lights on, running up and down main streets. Police departments were getting phone calls saying, "How dare you let your police officers drive like that in our community?" Quite frankly, they were getting blamed for things that security guards—"run amok security guards," I'll call them—were getting away with.

So we will be supporting the bill—I will be supporting the bill, and I've got indications that quite a few of us will be supporting the bill. I look forward to its getting to committee, and I thank you very much for introducing this bill a fifth time.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate related to the bill tabled by the member for Simcoe North, Mr Dunlop. I want to say at the outset that he is a colleague, of course, but beyond that, I think he is doing an outstanding job, not only of representing his riding and his constituents, but being an advocate for the stakeholders who fall under the umbrella of the Minister of Community Safety. He has reached out and is in constant contact with all of the interest groups, anyone who has a stake, if you will, on the activities and initiatives—and failure to act in some instances—of the Ministry of

Community Safety and corrections. I don't think the policing community could find a better friend in terms of standing up for their interests and standing up for the whole question and issues surrounding public safety in Ontario.

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So I want to compliment him on this fine initiative to table this legislation, the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act. This, as I think he and the previous presenter indicated, is an act that calls out for revamping and change to recognize the conditions that have been dramatically altered since the original legislation was passed some 35 years ago. Clearly it hasn't been updated to adjust to some of the new realities and responsibilities that have been assumed by the security guard industry and, as a result of those assumptions of responsibilities, some of the issues that have been raised surrounding that. We heard about uniforms, about the kinds of badges and the cars that are utilized, and the implication for the public, that in many instances they think they're dealing with a police officer when in fact it's a security guard who may not have had even basic training related to the challenges that could be faced by a community, a neighbourhood, an individual. So that is a concern that I've certainly heard over the years.

Last year, when I was in that particular ministry, we initiated a review of this act with the clear goal of moving ahead with legislative changes this year. Our critic, Mr Dunlop, has taken the bull by the horns here. I think it's wise that he is laying the table here, if you will, with respect to this, rather than waiting for the government to move. Essentially, the Liberal government has no agenda with respect to community safety or policing.

What the minister has indicated he will do related to this act is based on an initiative begun by the former government. So we know they have no agenda. We know that anything that is accomplished in a positive sense really had its origins in the former Conservative government. Of course we've seen some announcements that flowed from initiatives undertaken by the former government.

Some initiatives are cause for concern. I guess I can be critical in the sense of not having an agenda and looking for new initiatives, but at the same time, given some of the things that they have moved on, it makes you nervous if you care about public safety and security in the province. I cite as an example, when we were in office last year, effective August 1, we were moving phase 1 young offenders under the responsibility of the Ministry of Corrections. That made sense to virtually everyone except some folks on the left of the spectrum who have a different view of how young offenders, regardless of the degree of crime that they've been involved in, should all be treated as victims.

So what we saw, very quickly after the new government was formed, was a change in direction where the Liberal government formed a children's ministry. Instead of going along with the plans which were well underway—thousands of dollars had been spent on this—because of a political ideology that young offenders are victims, they pulled back on that. All of the young offenders now fall under a children's ministry.

I can respect in some instances that may be an appropriate landing spot for some of these folks, especially with first-time offenders and those who are of a certain age, but when you're talking about some of the 16- and 17-year-old repeat offenders, these are hardened criminals. If you visited some of our corrections facilities, I don't think you'd want to spend a couple hours in a lockup with some of these folks. They've lived very difficult lives, and some of them haven't lived very difficult lives. For a variety of reasons they've committed crimes, and some of them very, very serious crimes, including sexual assault and murder.

Now the Liberal government, in its lack of wisdom, has said that these people should be the responsibility of a children's ministry; let's treat these folks with kid gloves. That is a cause for concern.

Going back to Mr Dunlop's comments related to the security guards act and Minister Kwinter's response to the inquest findings that, "Yes, we're going to move ahead with legislation in the fall," essentially this was the intent of the previous government prior to the inquest results. Certainly we're hopeful, we're optimistic, listening to the comments of the government whip, that this will pass today and will go to committee. I'm sure the member will be receptive to friendly and helpful amendments to his legislation.

I think there is a concern, and I think that's one of the reasons Mr Dunlop has brought in his own legislation to drive this issue, to make sure that, in fact, the government does move, and that it's reflective of the concerns of all of the stakeholders that Mr Dunlop has taken the time to listen to and recognize those concerns and embody them in his legislation.

Again, I want to hark back to the concern that the Liberal government may not move on this. I have a great deal of respect for the minister, Mr Kwinter. He has been someone I've considered a friend over the years. But when you get into this opposition and government role that we all have to play—and those of us who have been around for a number of years have played it on both sides of the House—it's a difficult to thing to deal with, with friendship and the responsibilities you have as well.

In the last year or so Mr Kwinter, as a critic from the opposition side, was, I thought, some of us thought, out of character in some of his harsh criticisms of the government. I think if you recall, he was especially vigorously attacking Mr Flaherty, the member for the Oshawa-Durham area. Now that he is in government he has assumed some very serious responsibilities. People don't realize that the ministry Mr Kwinter is responsible for is the largest ministry in government in terms of employees. It has a budget in the neighbourhood of $1.6 billion or $1.7 billion. It's a big ministry with a great many responsibilities, and you can come into the office in the morning and find that you have a list of issues on your plate as long as your arm.

So I respect him for taking on this challenge, but at the same time he has to appreciate and understand that in that role he is going to be subject to criticism from the opposition, from the public, from stakeholders and others. The reality is, you have to have broad shoulders, and in that ministry especially you have to have broad shoulders. Certainly I suffered the slings and arrows of what you think in many respects is undue criticism in that ministry, especially on the corrections side. But it's something you have to come to grips with and deal with, and I understand the minister has been upset by some of the opposition criticisms. I understand and respect that, but at the same time he should reflect back on some of the comments he and his colleagues have made over the years. It's part and parcel of the business we've all chosen to engage in. It can sometimes be a little rough and a little unpleasant, and that's a side of it none of us likes, but we have to participate in it.

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So I have great concern about what's happening in the ministry that I so deeply care about, the people who work in that ministry and the fact that, in my view, this is not a priority for the Liberal government. Mr Kwinter, as an experienced minister, has been put in that spot, in my view, to calm the waters, to ensure that if any difficulties arise over the next couple of years someone with his experience can deal with them in a reasonable fashion and keep the government out of trouble. That's going to be difficult to do because it is such a difficult ministry to keep a handle on everything that could happen from any day.

Clearly, there is no agenda. I think our member will be talking about the commitment for 1,000 new cops. We don't see that happening. Certainly, it's not even referenced in the budget that was tabled May 18, so we're very dubious that it's going to happen, although we heard the culture minister stand in her place and say that she has money for a language cop to ensure that the language laws of the province are being carefully adhered to: money for a language cop, but no money for front-line police officers. That is passing strange and certainly would raise serious issues about the priorities of the Liberal government. I think it's more Liberal social engineering, which we've become used to, but I was hopeful that it wouldn't dominate the agenda of the current government, that they would move on issues like the bill to revamp the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act.

When you look at this bill, so many of the components of it just make good common sense: mandatory multi-level training; standards for the use of force and firearms in making arrests; different classes in portability of licences.

Again, you can look at some of the folks who are guards in the Brinks trucks, for example. That's a significant responsibility. Those folks can be faced with very difficult challenges, as we all know looking back over the history of North America with respect to armoured vehicles and the challenges and some of the casualties that those security guards have suffered as a result of their chosen profession. It should be a profession, I think, when you look at the level of responsibilities.

Going down the line, when you're providing guard-house security at a particular neighbourhood or an industrial complex: Again, those are the sorts of things for which graduated licensing, if you will, makes a lot of sense—where you don't have to meet the same standard of tests that someone who is a Brinks security guard should be able to meet. They are people who carry side arms, and in some instances, may be forced to use those side arms.

What the member is talking about makes so much sense, in terms of uniforms, vehicles, the kinds of identification badges that are utilized by security guards so that the public know when they're dealing with a police officer and when they're dealing with someone who is not a police officer, but in fact is a member of the security industry.

Again, with respect to this legislation and why this member's moving ahead, we are concerned about this government and its lack of agenda in this area. We saw them remove the word "security" from the ministry name; one of the first things they did when they took over the government. We've heard Mr Kwinter stand in his place and say, "Security is the responsibility of the federal government, and we have confidence in the federal government." Well, it's a shared responsibility. Security, especially border security, is a significant concern and should be a significant priority for the government of the day. When we look at over one million jobs in this province depending on ease of access to the US markets, we can't afford to have a terrorist incident that originates in this province and then realize the devastating impact on our economy and the ripple effect that would have on the Canadian economy.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): First, right off the bat, on behalf of the NDP caucus, I want to make it very clear that we support the legislation. We look forward—I certainly look forward and I know my colleagues do—Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East sitting here with me in this Legislature—over the course of this debate to seeing this go to committee. I think this is a very important beginning. I think it is substantial—but still, warrants being fleshed out and perhaps made more comprehensive than it is.

Again, it's overdue. Let's understand what gives rise to this. One is the increase in the privatization of policing, especially over the course of the last nine years. It's true. Mr Bradley knows, because he knows that we saw the last government, the Conservatives, download on to municipalities and reduce their support for municipalities. One of the fundamental flaws around public policing now is that policing is mandated provincially, yet municipalities have to carry the cost of policing on the base of their property taxes, which are becoming increasingly strained. Ms Horwath is intimate with this, in view of her long-time experience on Hamilton city

council and the incredible difficulties Hamilton—and any other community in this province—has had, especially over the course of the last nine years. Quite frankly, I don't want to isolate or distinguish the last nine years from the next four, because the pattern that was established by the Tories is certainly being maintained by the oh, so very conservative McGuinty Liberals.

The phenomenon of privatization of policing: I make reference to Mr Bradley because I recall raising in this Legislature some years ago now the phenomenon of one business improvement area having to utilize private policing because of the legitimate concern about the inadequacy of local policing, not because those police officers weren't committed or interested or dedicated enough to do the job, but because they were so dramatically and pathetically understaffed and under-resourced.

It's trite to say that communities must not only be safe but they also must perceive themselves to be safe. My concern about the levels of staffing with respect to public police forces—bona fide, legitimate police forces—is that police associations have been ignored (1) by their local services boards and (2) by the provincial government in terms of the need for improved staffing resources. The sad reality is that we continue to have fewer cops per capita on our streets than we did 10 years ago, back in 1994.

Now we have a proliferation of private police forces, and it should be of concern, because let's understand that private police forces are not subject to what is and what should be the rigorous governance of publicly elected and/or publicly appointed police services boards nor to the volume of legislation that governs police activities. So we should be very concerned about this growth of privatized police. New Democrats endorse the proposition that persons fulfilling these privatized policing roles should be adequately trained and—I will say it, yes—regulated and licensed.

We've seen and heard reference over the course of the last few minutes to the recent coroner's inquest here in the city of Toronto. Let's make this very clear: We can't legitimately expect these private police forces and their staff to meet new and higher standards if they continue to be paid at the abysmally low pay rates that that work/job ghetto has been inclined to pay. Let's say it right up front. These private security personnel are among the lowest-paid people in our communities. So we can't on the one hand call on them to have better training and call on them to have attended any number of community college programs. The member for Brant speaks of the community college program that he's familiar with. I am very familiar with the Niagara College law and security programs and similar programs that do an excellent job of training people, but, by God, I'm not going to tell a young woman or man to go to Niagara College for two or three years and then go out there and get a crummy $8.25 job, thank you very much.

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The Liberals' pathetic inaction on minimum wage did nothing to address that issue—a bloody embarrassment and an assault on low-income workers across this province. For a bunch of people whose minimum wage here is $85,000 a year, and all but a handful, all but four Liberal caucus members earning anywhere from $6,000 to $12,000 to $13,000 to $20,000 to $25,000 in addition—to tell minimum wage workers, "Oh, here's a few cents. Here's less than the price of a coffee. Go home and be quiet." So I say, if we're going to talk about ensuring that security personnel working for private firms out there in the public field are going to be better trained, are going to have to meet higher and consistent standards, we've also got to make sure that they're better paid.

That takes us to the third issue: ensuring that these workers are unionized. I am proud of my sisters and brothers in the trade union movement, United Steelworkers amongst them—not solely, but amongst them—who have participated in the organization of them by security staff of trade unions, so that they can collectively bargain for better wages, wages that better reflect the skills that they're expected to have and better reflect the real needs of any worker, quite frankly.

The issue of pay, of course, is immediately related to unionization because unionized workers are better-paid workers, make no mistake about it. Quite frankly, on average, unionized workers make $5 an hour more than non-unionized workers. You know my position. My position is very clear. The NDP's position is very clear. It's never wrong for workers to fight for better wages. What's wrong is a government that keeps its boot, that keeps its heel on the lowest-paid workers in this province and mocks them by tossing them a few cents in terms of an increase in minimum wage, while the minimum wage here is over $85,000 a year.

The issue around copycat cruisers, copycat uniforms is a real one. New Democrats believe that there have to be standards which clearly distinguish the uniforms and the tools of private security forces, private police officers, from those of public police officers. But I want to make it very clear: We're not talking about putting private security officers in outlandish clothing or in anything that denigrates them or subjects them to ridicule. To do so would be disrespectful of the role that they play out there in private workplaces, in shopping malls and any number of places like that.

But I put this to all the members of this assembly, especially these Liberals here, these Liberal backbenchers so numerous: If you're really concerned about the issues being raised in Bill 88, if you really care, then you're going—

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Look, you can't do this in isolation. If you really care about security in our community, you're going to give the communities in this province the resources to invest in public policing.

We have scenarios down where I come from. Mr Bradley's there too; he knows full well. I've talked about it before. If the crooks only knew how few police officers we have on some of our evening shifts, it would be a free-for-all.

Niagara's not unique, especially in communities where you've got rural areas, never mind the north, where you've got huge expanses. You've got some pitifully low numbers of cars out on the street at any given point in time. The Niagara Region Police Association is the first to identify this. People complain about inadequate response times.

Well, if this government, like the last, continues to underfund police forces in this province, it's going to get worse before it gets better. If this government continues to underfund public police forces across the province, there is going to be a huge price to be paid, not just in the fear that accompanies the perception of the inadequacy of public safety, but in the reality of there not being cops out there able to do the jobs as they want to do the jobs, because they're being handicapped.

I want to say this to the Liberals—I said it to the Tories. They're not in government any more, so it's no longer of any use to blame them. But now I say directly to you that you as a government are handcuffing our cops. You should be handcuffing or helping the cops handcuff the crooks; instead, you're handcuffing our cops. Then you have the lack of grace to suggest that somehow you're burdened by a deficit—and a deficit that you're calling upon the poorest people in our society to pay off, a deficit that once again you're going to the middle class telling them to pay off, while your rich friends, your Mercedes Benz friends, your Jaguar friends, your Lincoln Town Car stretch friends, your Frank Stronach friends, your Mercury Marquis Landau cabinet minister friends with the leather and plush upholstery and those dark tinted windows—you wanted to tax the muffin instead of the Mercedes-Benz. Look what you guys tried to pull off. You wanted to tax the crummy buck-and-a-half muffin at Tim Hortons instead of the rich guy in the S500 or the S600 with those tinted windows cruising his way down the passing lane on the QEW, on the 400 highway, knowing he could do 140 klicks an hour because we don't have any cops on the 400-series highways.

Interjections.

Mr Kormos: We don't. You know full well there's a crisis of policing on our 400-series highways. Northern Ontario has suffered a drought of police officers. Just as Paul Martin is responsible for the deaths of homeless people in Toronto, I say that this government now has to accept responsibility for deaths on highways when we have inadequate policing on our 400-series highways.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: I've listened carefully, and it has been a few minutes since I've heard the words "private investigators" or "security guards." I wish we could get back to the subject.

Mr Kormos: You bet your boots, Speaker. I'm talking about public policing versus private policing. I'm telling this government once again that as long as they persist in underfunding public policing, there's going to continue to be a proliferation of private policing, and as long as there's a proliferation of private policing, we're going to have to continue to address this issue and the problem is going to continually be one step ahead of any legislative efforts on the part of this assembly.

You can pass this bill, and I urge passing this bill, but the fact is, once you pass it, as pressures increase on communities to buy private policing—and again, what does private policing mean? It means only the people who can afford to pay for it get it. Poor folks don't get private cops; it's the rich people in their gated communities who have private cops. They've got those canine patrol cars, you know the ones, K/9 that drive around, the guys in the SWAT team outfits. That's what we're talking about, of course, when we're talking about regulating the uniforms, but they drive around in their cars with the German shepherd in the back. It's rich people who have those. Poor people don't get that. Middle-class folks don't get that. Middle-class folks and poor folks have to depend on an increasingly depleted, understaffed and under-resourced public police system. The real issue here ought not to be a private security guard who's trying to do his job with whatever modest level of training his employer permits him to have; the real issue is the adequacy of public policing, whether it's the Ontario Provincial Police or municipal police forces, like the Niagara Regional Police down where I come from, or the Toronto police where so many of you are from.

You can pay lip service to the bill and pass it, but if you're going to be meaningful about ensuring the safety of communities, you're going to invest real money back into police forces across this province. You're not going to hide behind your passion to protect your rich friends from accepting responsibility to pay their fair share of taxes and to accept responsibility for the benefits they've enjoyed as a result of Tory tax cuts and the resulting deficit this province finds itself burdened with.

1050

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): I intend to support this legislation, as I support the legislation put forward by Mario Sergio as a private member's bill before the House dealing with the licensing and training of private security guards—that's Bill 66, as you would know. I supported in the years 2001, 2002 and 2003 the private member's bill by David Levac, the member for Brant.

I think the bill has many compelling elements to it. It is not a perfect bill. Seldom do we have legislation that comes forward in a private members' hour that is totally perfect and acceptable to everyone. But I think it captures what David Levac and Mario Sergio have been trying to do for some period of time.

I think we recognize that a significant problem exists out there today with some security guards who are not adequately trained. On many occasions, people from security guard companies endeavour to portray themselves as police officers, and we know that, first, they don't have the training and, second, they don't have the onus and responsibility that members of the police services across this province have. So this bill is quite compelling.

I listened to my friend for Leeds-Grenville being critical of the fact that the government was not moving more quickly on this bill. I simply remind my good friend Bob Runciman that in 2001 his government had a chance to approve the bill by Mr David Levac, the member for Brant, and chose not to do so. They had a chance to do it in 2002 and 2003, and to support the bill by Mario Sergio. We're not going to occupy ourselves with partisan rants in this regard, but when I hear those criticisms, I simply think it's important that the people who are watching in the gallery or at home know that the previous government had a chance to implement this legislation and did not do so.

That doesn't at all diminish the fact that legislation is needed. Indeed, there are areas of some communities in the province that have hired what they would call private police forces or security forces, and the individuals there are not trained as police officers. They cannot deal with the public. It is a very onerous responsibility to be a police officer in this province. There are a lot of obligations on police officers in Ontario and in other jurisdictions. That is why they go through such intensive training and retraining. That is why they are held accountable and security guards in the private sector are not held accountable.

The member for Niagara Centre appropriately pointed out the privatization of police services in this province over the past eight and a half years as a result of significant downloading and other factors. I think the bill commends itself for consideration by committee, and of course by the House today. I certainly intend to support it.

I did hear some words that perhaps diverted a bit from the tenor of this bill. I heard about members on the government side getting paid more money, and I just wanted to remind people, now that the New Democrat Party has party status thanks to the new member of Hamilton East, that virtually all the people in the NDP, I think, will get more money, and I am pleased for them. But I think that's not a known fact. I heard about limousines and something of that nature. I know that Mr Howard Hampton, the leader of the New Democrat Party, will really be pleased to have that government car and driver take him around Ontario. I just wanted to mention that in case people weren't quite aware.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to rise this morning and speak in support of the private member's bill from Mr Dunlop. This is an issue that has certainly increased in profile in the last few months. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of security guards in the province. There are now 29,000 licensed private investigators and security guards but, interestingly, almost as many unlicensed security guards. In fact, 20,000 people are acting as security guards or private investigators without licences, which in itself is a serious problem. Between 1991 and 2001, there was an increase of 73.6% in the number of people who were acting in this capacity.

Security guards and private investigators are regulated by the private investigators and security guards branch of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The act that governs this has actually not been updated since it was originally introduced over 35 years ago. Clearly it's long overdue for an update.

Concerns have been raised around the lack of training requirements for private investigators and security guards, around problems with the whole licensing process, and with public confusion when they see the uniform: Is this a security guard or a bona fide police officer? So there are a number of issues that I think we all agree we need to pay some attention to.

The Shand inquiry has probably brought this whole issue to public attention. You may recall that Patrick Shand was killed by a security guard who was trying to arrest him in a parking lot in Toronto. The coroner's jury, which recently sat and released its findings, made a number of recommendations. Those included that training programs should be required and that those training programs should at least include the use of first aid, CPR and use-of-force training. We've also been told by the coroner's jury that we need to look at the licensing process—that there should be mandatory licensing of private guards—and that generally we should have more training for people who may be in a position to stop someone to try to make an arrest as part of their duties, even though they're not a police officer.

In terms of public perception, I think that many people think this has only come up as a result of the Shand inquiry. In fact, that's not true. To his credit, the former Minister of Public Safety, Mr Runciman, did release a discussion paper in June 2003 to look at the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act. Our Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Honourable Monte Kwinter, decided very early in our mandate to carry on with that work. Before the Shand inquiry actually had hearings, let alone released recommendations, Minister Kwinter had directed that the consultation go forward and that we talk to the industry about how we need to amend the act, with a view to amending the act and bringing in legislation as early as next fall.

The consultations that the ministry is currently undertaking are focusing on the need for mandatory and consistent basic training for all security personnel. We would be looking not at just CPR and first aid but at a whole lot of training around the issues of the responsibilities of security guards versus the responsibility of police officers; what security officers are and are not allowed to do; how, when they have to arrest somebody or use force, that should be done appropriately, as opposed, in the Shand case, to inappropriately.

We also want to make sure we have a mandatory licensing process in place and that we are ensuring that people who have a criminal record do not become security guards, along with a host of other issues. I will be supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes.

Mr Dunlop: I appreciate everyone who spoke this morning on the bill: the member from Brant; my col-

league Bob Runciman from Leeds-Grenville; the member from St Catharines, Minister Bradley; the member from Niagara Centre, Mr Kormos; and from Guelph-Wellington, the PA for community safety and corrections. I thank you for the kind words this morning.

This is a piece of legislation, as we've said earlier, that hasn't been updated since 1966. I don't think there are too many pieces of legislation that affect so many people and have not had the opportunity to have some kind of revision or updates or amendment over those years. I think we said earlier that eight separate Premiers had an opportunity to deal with this, and it just hasn't happened. Now is the time.

Obviously the Shand inquiry has brought a lot of emphasis to this, but it's always been at the forefront of our law and order people: our police association, the OPP, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. They're the people who are responsible for law and order in our province. It's always a high priority on their agenda and at any of the conferences they hold.

As critic for that position, I'm honoured to be able to present this piece of legislation this morning. I'm hoping that over the next short period of time we can maybe get it to committee, maybe work with the government. I'm looking forward to doing what we can to make sure the recommendations of Shand and the recommendations that are part of Bill 88 are actually implemented and become law here in Ontario.

As the Shand inquiry mentioned in recommendation 2, it's very important that these recommendations are implemented in a very expedient manner. I'm hoping the House will support that and actually see that it takes place.

1100

ONTARIO WORKERS' MEMORIAL ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE MONUMENT COMMÉMORATIF DES TRAVAILLEURS DE L'ONTARIO

Mr Ramal moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to establish the Ontario Workers' Memorial / Projet de loi 79, Loi visant à ériger le monument commémoratif en hommage aux travailleurs de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr Ramal, you have 10 minutes.

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm proud today to rise in this House to speak about my bill, An Act to establish the Ontario Workers' Memorial. This bill is not a new bill. It was first introduced as Bill 37, the Ontario Workers' Memorial Act, by Dominic Agostino on May 21, 2003. That bill didn't get past first reading in this House, maybe because the timing wasn't enough to get the chance.

Today I have the honour and pleasure to introduce it on behalf of the late Dominic Agostino. I think it would be good to honour the member from Hamilton East for his work and effort to protect, work and advocate on behalf of the workers of Hamilton East and all the workers across this province.

This bill would have the effect of erecting a memorial in or adjacent to the legislative precinct to honour the memory of those who lost their lives on the job.

It's true that many Ontario communities have memorials to workers killed on the job. In fact, 49 towns, cities and villages have such monuments. In London, we have a workers' memorial that is located outside the Tolpuddle Co-op Hall on Adelaide Street, but I bet that if you asked most people, they wouldn't have known about it. I didn't even know about it until very recently. I bet in each of those 49 communities most people wouldn't know there was a memorial to workers who were injured or killed on the job.

Yet every year over 300,000 Ontarians are injured on the job through an accident or by contracting a disease. Every one of us remembers the disastrous disease that hit Toronto last year, SARS, which killed many innocent people, especially front-line workers who gave their lives to protect the people of this province.

The WSIB reports that in 2003, 359,353 workers suffered injuries and occupational diseases, and 552 died. Those are the total claims made to the WSIB last year. Many people, sometimes killed, were never reported to the WSIB.

That's why I'm very happy to see that our government is doing more to help ensure the safety of our workers. More inspectors, 25 of them, have been hired to enforce the Employment Standards Act, and more, I am told, will be coming on-line down the road. It is that commitment to the Employment Standards Act that will go so far to help workers and employers thrive in a safer workplace, because a fair workplace is a safer workplace. Cracking down on bad employers through education and training, through legislation, enforcement and prosecution if it is necessary, are some very good ways in which we will travel down the road to safer workplaces.

For some, these measures are too late. They paid the ultimate price doing their jobs. I think it's right, and long past due, that we as a province together have one place, one memorial, to those who died while working.

I have said many times in this House that the workers of Ontario are the lifeblood of this province. Their talent and skills have made Ontario what it is today: the most important economy in Canada. I ask for the support of this House in passing this bill to honour the workers in this province.

I believe the workers in this province deserve all the respect—especially those who have lost their lives—in continuing to work across this province to strengthen our economy and to continue giving life and effort to have a strong economy to support other programs in this province.

I come from London-Fanshawe. London-Fanshawe is rich with many factories. The structure of that riding is of hard-working people who wake up every morning and go

to work to contribute to this economy. This bill will give them some kind of incentive and some kind of honour, to honour the people who go to work on a daily basis. They will believe that people in this province respect their effort and their work, especially if they are injured or die while doing their work.

Every year 300,000 workers are injured on the job. Almost 100,000 of them were injured severely enough that they had to take time off work. We have to remember those workers, the people who build our vehicles, grow our food, build our homes and sell us goods and services every day. Without them, the economy would grind to a halt.

I believe this bill is a small token to honour those courageous people in many fields in this province, to tell them that we're thinking of them, that we believe in their efforts, that we believe their work is going in the right place. It will encourage others to continue doing great work and a great job.

I believe our government, the Dalton McGuinty government, is doing a lot through all the ministries to make sure there is safety in place. I was listening to the Minister of Labour a while ago. He was talking about safety in the workplace. All of his ministry is put to work to make sure that all the workplaces in this province, whether a construction site or factory or hospital or anywhere, are safe, to make sure that all workers come to a safe place and that all jobs are being introduced in a professional and safe way. This is the only way we can protect our workers in this province.

1110

I heard my colleague a few minutes ago speaking about the negligence of our government toward workers. I believe for the first time ever in this province, or for the last nine years at least, we increased the minimum wage. We introduced time off work if you have somebody in your household who's sick. All of us, every one of you listened many times to debates and many speakers talking about supporting the bill, to make sure that all people who have someone who's sick can take some time off—all this in an effort to strengthen the workplace, to respect and honour all workers across this province.

I believe that by passing this bill, we can send a great message to the workers in this province that, as members of this assembly, we care about then. We'll try to work and do our best to make sure, through our ministers, through our government, that all the workplaces they go to are safe and protected, and we'll make sure they're honoured if something happens to them.

For that reason, I would like to ask all members from both sides of the House, from the three parties, to support that bill, because I think it shows great respect for the people who built and continue to build our economy and this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It is indeed my pleasure to rise and respond to Bill 79 from the member for London-Fanshawe.

I would like to start by saying it's extremely important to leave the message that, in my view, we will be supporting this important statement about worker safety.

Again, the bill is not original. It's been around the House for some years, but it is also a testament to former member Dominic Agostino from Hamilton East, who introduced the bill on May 21, 2003. Fittingly, Mr Ramal brought this forward on May 10, 2004.

It is an issue that has been around, really, if you look back to the Workers' Memorial Day, which was enshrined in 1984 as a day of mourning and now is respected in over 80 countries throughout the world. April 28 is the day that we honour the memory and the families of injured workers in many and varied workplaces in Ontario, in Canada and throughout the world.

We are fortunate to have a strong and vibrant economy and an opportunity for young people and people of all skills to work. That's the most important thing: the opportunity to display and demonstrate their skills, earn a living income and to feel the respect of that earned income. But the other side of the equation is to eliminate and eradicate, if possible, all the potential risks and hazards that befall us in the workplace.

Last year, I recall in the SARS epidemic, the SARS health outbreak in Ontario, those persons who are often overlooked in the workplace—that is, the nurses, doctors and other health care providers—were at severe risk. I would like to be on the record as stating the great respect and appreciation and indeed admiration that I have for those professionals and those people in their workplace who put themselves at risk.

But you should know that nurses are in one of the most hazardous professions in Ontario, and that needs to be reinforced. Just recently at the hospital in my riding of Durham, Lakeridge in Oshawa, I was invited to attend the commissioning of these automatic lifts that prevent workplace injuries in hospitals. So hospitals are areas and workplaces that we often assume but don't relate—we often think of workplace injuries being tied more to construction sites or heavy industry, whereas people of every age and every skill can be put at risk. So I put on the record that the workers who worked through the incidents of SARS and in ongoing cases, often in highly infectious workplaces, need to be respected. Every possible action should be taken, and it's incumbent on the government to put that in place.

It's also important for me and my riding. In my riding, the largest employer would be General Motors. General Motors has a very large facility: a truck plant, two auto plants and other related assembly facilities, but also is in the process of a major expansion for much-needed growth in the auto sector, which is important for all of Ontario, really, as the second-largest job creator and economic engine in the province.

I know, from my 30 years of working at General Motors—and much of that time was spent in personnel and labour relations but latterly I was a shift supervisor in the assembly environment—the risk that workers are placed in, often unknowingly. Workplace safety is

extremely important, and that's a two-way street. It's incumbent on the employer, but it's also incumbent on the employee to participate by wearing the appropriate safety gear that has been mandated through the local contract language, but also to do whatever is necessary to bring to the attention of those supervisors those things that constitute a hazard, whether it's a spill on the floor, a low-hanging device or possible interruptions in their workspace that can present as a hazard.

I know, whenever incidents occur, how much anguish is forced on to the workplace and the workers, at whatever level or whatever function they're in. It's a tragedy. An injury, whether it's someone losing a finger, falling into an open area or being struck by a lift truck or some other moving vehicle—the whole workplace is in shock. If you want to roll that out, I think of the families. If it's the principal income earner for the family, it is a real tragedy in the broadest sense in that limited community, but in their family and extended family; in fact, in their community.

I think next of the Darlington nuclear plant, and of course safety is a top priority in those plants. There's possible exposure to all sorts of issues along the nuclear field, but I know safety is a priority. They have a very proud record of zero lost-time accidents, and that's just part of what we're speaking about. But safety and the safety culture in those workplaces is an ongoing discipline that's absolutely essential.

The unspoken tragedy of someone actually losing their life is the very worst example of what ultimately can happen. That really does bring itself home throughout Ontario, if I have my numbers right. According to the Workplace Safety Insurance Board, which accumulates these statistics, in 2003, 552 workers were killed; in 2002, 596 died; in 2001, 453 lost their lives. It's tragic to think of those numbers. In fact, if you look at the Canadian numbers, 900 Canadians are killed each year as a result of injuries or illness and accidents related to the workplace. So it is a real tragedy. How do you recognize or bring to focus the tragedy to the human condition?

Mr Ramal, I do respect the intention of your bill, with all regard. Again, looking at it in a legislative sense, I have reviewed the bill. It's not new, as I said. I had the occasion, as I said, to work in industry. Also, when elected in 1995, when Elizabeth Witmer was the Minister of Labour, I was on her labour advisory committee, because my undergraduate degree is a specialist in human resources, or labour economics actually. I was pleased to bring the 30 years' experience of working in industry to the table, and workplace safety was part of that. So there has always been the initiative to strike some memorial, and that's the essence of the legislation, the commissioning of some memorial.

I think it's fitting to have a tribute. Certainly on April 28, I have the accounts here of the spoken word of the Minister of Labour and all of the critics on each side of the House. There isn't a person here who would not find a way to pay fitting tribute to all workers and to realize there are risks.

1120

I can recall when my oldest son graduated from the Royal Military College and he was commissioned as a flight officer on the Sea King helicopters. He actually was involved in an incident. As I recall, they were doing one of the regular patrols on the Sea King helicopter, and of course he wasn't a fully trained pilot at that time. They developed a hydraulic leak while at sea and they had no choice but to force-land the helicopter on, I believe it was, a golf course right off Cape Breton Island. But I think it drove home to me that all experience has risk, all those work-type experiences, including being here in the Legislature. There are certain risks involved, I guess, in our roles.

Looking at the bill, it establishes—I'll just read the contents here: "The purpose of the bill is to require that a memorial be established in or adjacent to the legislative precinct of the Legislative Assembly to honour the memory of workers who have died on the job"—very specific recommendations.

I reviewed it, and there are a couple of concerns that I just raise for members of the House to bring to the debate. One of the issues is, fundamentally, that the bill as I interpret it is actually out of order. It's written in such a way that it isn't really out of order, but a private member cannot bring forward a bill that requires the government to expend money. I think it's important, in commissioning any private member's bill, of which I have several, that it cannot require the government to spend money. This does refer, this issue here, and I'll read it—section 2: "The Board of Internal Economy of the Legislative Assembly shall take such actions as it considers appropriate to establish and provide for the maintenance of the workers' memorial, including consulting with experts in the design of memorials." At the end here it says, "The report shall recommend a site for the memorial, make design recommendations and contain an estimate of the costs, and may make such other reasonable recommendations" to the Board of Internal Economy. The costs—and it's only a technical reference, but I'm saying to you that with unanimous consent this will probably go to committee, to bring more discussion and appropriate comment. I think that's just one of the small concerns I have.

The other one is the whole minutiae of when you start to recognize the deaths. Who validates or legitimizes those incidents as work-related? That becomes a whole quagmire of regulations of who, under what authority and under what mandate—whether it's the WSIB, when did they start commissioning statistics etc. So there's some detail there.

Going forward, I think, would be that the people who disastrously met with tragedy in the workplace in 2003 would be left out. Those persons with SARS implications: How do we trace back the implications that they may at some time in the future not be with us? And can we trace that workplace illness or infection or whatever back to the workplace? That becomes a whole very fuzzy area of implementing the bill.

But again it's not the lack of desire. I think we need, and in the workplace specifically, the institution, whether it's General Motors, Ontario Hydro or any of the varied workplaces in the province that would—and I believe they do constitute and have a memorial or a reflection, and certainly there's great sadness that affects the workplace, and indeed the community.

I want to bring to bear the respect that I do, in my role as the MPP for the riding of Durham, meet regularly and whenever asked, with all of the spokespersons or stakeholders in the area of labour. I just want to put on the record some of those people:

John Gillett is the business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 894. I've met with Terry Kelsey as well. Edwin Hull is the president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. John Lewis is the president of the Durham Region Labour Council. A good friend of mine, Bill Harford, is past president and still active in the labour council in Durham. Garth Cochrane is the business agent and Larry Cann is the business manager for UA Local 463 of the plumbers, steamfitters and welders, a very highly skilled group that works in high-risk situations, primarily construction. Joel Nevell is the business representative for the carpenters union, Local 397. They're just a few of the people I had on record in my constituency office whom I actually have spoken with or met with.

In my riding of Durham, as Mr Hoy would recognize, agriculture safety is something that's often overlooked. I want to bring respect to the Ontario Farm Safety Association and the work they do to educate current and young workers in their work environments. I commend the work of Karen Yellowise, as well as Jacqueline Vaneyk, who is the actual president of the Durham Region Federation of Agriculture. Agriculture and farm implements are a highly sophisticated business today—the equipment they use and the environments they work in, often in close space, heavy equipment and automation. You need to be on your toes. There are a lot of young people involved in that workplace as well.

That brings to mind one of the other things I want to mention. I had the privilege of meeting Paul Kells. Most of you would know his son, Sean, who I think was 19, a student who was killed in the workplace. To his credit, Paul Kells turned a sad circumstance into a positive outcome, I believe, for young workers. He established the Safe Communities Foundation, and it's all part of educating young workers.

I think, if I were to bring conclusion to this in respect of what I've said, education plays an important role in workplace safety. There's no better place for the program than in workplaces and in schools today, as young people enter their first job, to be aware of the hazards and their personal responsibilities and the degree of risk.

But everyone here, I believe, out of respect for the workers' memorial, is supportive. There are some questions that need to be asked. I would be supportive if this private member's bill from Mr Ramal would go to committee. In the discussion we would bring respect to those, and indeed to all workers, who contribute to making our lives better through a great economy in Ontario.

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to notify members of the assembly that the NDP will also be supporting this bill and supporting its going to committee. I'm very pleased to be taking the opportunity to speak on it myself, as it did come forward originally from the former member for Hamilton East, Dominic Agostino. It gives me great pleasure to be able to be here today to speak to the bill.

I can imagine the reason that it was brought forward by Dominic was because of his knowledge of the numbers of workers, particularly in Hamilton and Hamilton East, who have been killed on the job. As members of this assembly will know, the types of industries that we have in Hamilton—largely the steel industry is one where injuries occur on the job, unfortunately very frequently, and deaths occur frequently as well. The city of Hamilton in fact already has a memorial on city hall grounds. It was erected several years ago. For 20 years we in the city of Hamilton have been recognizing Injured Workers' Day on April 28 at that memorial. I think it will be an absolutely fabulous thing to have such a memorial here, where we can make similar speeches and appropriate memorials to those workers who are injured on the job.

Members have mentioned the number of people who have been killed on the job in 2003: over 500. Last year, 327 Ontario workers were carried to their graves by pallbearers, and I believe that one single person killed on the job is too many in this day and age in Ontario. My understanding is that there are hundreds of thousands of workers who are submitting compensation claims to the WSIB on an annual basis in Ontario. That, again, is unacceptable. We have to find ways to ensure that workers, who go to work every morning, come home whole with all their limbs and all of their health in place at the end of each working day so that their families can then re-welcome them into the household, knowing they've had a safe and productive day at work.

So there are a number of things that we need to do in this province to address the ongoing lack of safety, lack of health and lack of regulation around the various risks that workers take on the job. Those risks are not only the kinds of risks that are of accidental types of injuries occurring with heavy equipment or with other kinds of things, but also the risks that occur when people are put in situations where substances or chemicals or other kinds of cancer-causing agents, for example, are found in the workplace.

1130

If you look at the true toll of these kinds of things in the workplace, there are some estimates that indicate that occupational diseases are, in fact, affecting up to 6,000 Ontario workers every year—6,000 Ontario workers every year who are becoming diseased because of exposure to various cancer-causing agents in the workplace. Occupational cancer, in fact, makes up a significant portion of occupational disease.

From my understanding of the issue, there are consultants in the industries who argue that there is a significant risk factor in occupational cancer, that up to 5% of all cancers are occupational cancers. However, those who are not as close to industry and who are taking a different perspective, more of an advocacy perspective or more of a perspective where we're trying to broaden the types of exposures that are out there in terms of analysis, those other types of consultants will indicate that anywhere from 9% to 40% of all cancers are occupationally caused in Ontario—40% of all cancers.

We know, just from the burden on our health care system, that cancer is a growing concern for our community. If this is the case, then we have to do a lot more to regulate and figure out what it is that is causing so much cancer in Ontarians, and if that is the case, the occupations people are undertaking, that people are going to work and being exposed to agents and substances that are causing cancer—and if it were at the top end of that rate, if the 40% rate is, in fact, one that's feasible and one that can be proven to be the case, that would mean between 2,200 and 9,800 workers, almost 10,000 workers are dying of cancer every year as a result of their exposures in the workplace, and that's simply unacceptable. In addition to the human suffering, the health care costs of these cancers range anywhere from $130 million to $500 million in Ontario. Most of this money would be reimbursed to the Ontario health care system by the WSIB, if these occupational cancers were recognized.

But very few workers actually make the connection between their ill health, their feeling of unwellness and exposures they have actually encountered in the workplace. Just over 382 fatal occupational disease claims were made to the WSIB in 2003. What we're seeing, then, is that about 400 people have made claims around occupational fatalities that were cancer-related, that were disease-related to the workplace, but in fact that could be as many as 10,000 if we had a handle on the substances people are exposed to in the workplace every single day. Of course, those exposures day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year eventually cause cancer for workers in Ontario, and that's just not acceptable.

In the city of Hamilton, the memorial that was raised to injured workers was done as a result of a very strong labour movement in our city. The labour movement is strong in our city largely because of issues like this, largely because of the problems and concerns and difficulties workers have on the job in maintaining their health and maintaining their ability to have safe and full lives.

When we had the memorial erected at Hamilton's city hall, it really provided an opportunity for people from the labour movement, politicians, loved ones of injured workers and people who had died on the job, activists, health care providers—all of these people, on April 28, now have a place in Hamilton where we can go and where we can give adequate and appropriate and necessary—not only words of mourning but also words of anticipation for the justice that we can create in the future, for the work that we can do to prevent these diseases. I believe the saying is, "Mourn for the dead, but fight for the living." That is our obligation in this House. It's to fight for the living. It's to fight to make sure that those cancer-causing agents, those environments that people are put in to this very day—there are, I'm sure, thousands of people right now in Ontario being exposed to something that can maybe in five years, maybe in 10 years, end up giving them cancer. These are the things that are incumbent upon us to do right now.

It is with great pleasure, again, that I bring these comments on the bill. I think we really do need to constantly remember, not just on April 28 but on every single day of every year, and be cautious about the abuse of human lives that can occur in the workplace. It's a responsibility of employers. It's a responsibility of regulators like ourselves, and we need to take that responsibility seriously. I hope that after the memorial is erected, there may come a day in Ontario where we can say, "This memorial was erected because there used to be deaths of workers on the job, because we used to have a problem with exposure of workers to cancer-causing agents," where we can proudly say as Ontarians that we've taken care of that problem, that we've done the things that need to be done to prevent injuries and fatalities on the job as well as disease-causing exposures.

We in the NDP and the labour movement have fought for the living, not just in the struggle for better prevention but also for better protection for those who survive workplace accidents, and we look forward to continuing to do that.

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I too am very pleased to speak in support of this bill. We have to point out that this is important to all of us in this House on a personal level because of the man who spearheaded the bill. I want to thank the member for London-Fanshawe for following through on this bill.

It was just recently that I had the vice-president of the Hamilton and District Injured Workers Group in my office. He was telling me of the work he had been doing with the former member for Hamilton East, Dominic Agostino, and, through him, with our government. We talked about Dominic's spirit and the legacy he has left.

I just want to take a moment while we're doing this to talk about the man who spearheaded this bill. I knew him first as a journalist and then, second, as a colleague. He is known to all of us as a tireless and unapologetic fighter for his constituents and for the underdog. As a journalist, he was so tireless and actually so creative and ambitious about getting his issues into the media and his constituents' concerns into the spotlight that we would actually try in the newsrooms of Hamilton to have "Dominic-free news days," as we called them. I have to tell you, we didn't always succeed. That's how successful and how creative he was at getting his issues out there, championing causes.

When I came to this side of the microphone, I found a tremendous colleague, a loyal man, an incredibly brave

man and a savvy politician. I have to tell you, I felt I was able to call him, night or day, for advice, like his constituents would be able to call him night or day for help or advice, and they could count on getting it. I very much miss his presence here, and I miss being able to give him that phone call. But I am very happy today to be standing here to support his bill that he spearheaded and also to be able to say that I will be presenting petitions on behalf of the injured workers' group later this afternoon, and basically on behalf of Dominic. He would be presenting those petitions today if he were here. So I am pleased to be doing that.

This bill reminds us all that it is our responsibility as human beings, as part of our society, to look out for each other, to watch each other's back, to care for each other; and that's really the essence of this. A monument is a symbol, and it will remind us at all times that that is what we are to do, each and every one of us. Whether we're in different parties, whether we're from different groups of any kind, it is that as individuals, it is our responsibility to look out for each other. So I happily speak in support of this bill, and once again thank the member of London-Fanshawe for bringing this forth and following through on the work of Dominic Agostino.

1140

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm pleased to speak to the bill which, as has been indicated by my capable colleague Ms Horwath from Hamilton East—I just want to say to the folks of Hamilton East: God bless you and thank you very much for your enthusiasm about the NDP here at Queen's Park. I was down there in Hamilton East, and I was telling folks on the doorsteps—I'd be with Andrea, we'd knock on a door and they'd say, "Andrea." They'd be saying, "Oh, that's right, you're Kormos." But they'd be telling me, "Andrea's wonderful. She's great." I'm saying, "Listen, I know. If you've got any more folks like this in Hamilton, please let us know, or quite frankly, if you've got people like that anywhere else in the province, we'd be more than pleased to have you in the chamber."

Ms Horwath has already laid out very clearly New Democrat support for this bill. I am incredibly hard pressed to refer to the incredible slaughter, poisoning and assault of our sisters and brothers in our workplaces as accidents. Like more than a few others in this chamber, I've had an opportunity to review and examine workers' comp WSIB files. I've had an opportunity to sit down with workers who have been assaulted and maimed in our workplaces.

You see, an accident is exactly that: It's an accident. It's something for which the causation is outside of our control. An accident is, oh, I suppose, referred to by many as "an act of God." But I'm not aware of a single workplace maiming, poisoning, slaughter or murder that can be attributed to a mere act of God—not one—that one could not trace the causation to a phenomenon that could have been controlled.

It is shameful that we continue to slaughter our sisters and brothers in our workplaces in this province in the year 2004. It is shameful that we continue to cripple our sisters and brothers, who do nothing more than try to work to put food on their table, to pay their mortgages, to feed their kids, to send their kids to college and university. Every worker in this province, every worker anywhere, has a right to leave that workplace, perhaps tired, but as physically and emotionally healthy as they were when they came to work that morning.

Here we are in this Legislature—and again, there are many people with many diverse backgrounds. But here we are, the suited class, if you will. While there may be many of us who worked in industrial work sites at earlier stages in our lives, there's none of us who have to get up at 5 every morning to be at the workplace by 6 every morning, regardless of the weather, regardless of how well you feel, regardless of how tired you are from having worked the day before and then perhaps having worked all night or cared for a sick kid or any other number of circumstances.

I certainly hope all of us attend the day of mourning for slaughtered and maimed workers. As Andrea Horwath says, as workers in this province say, as trade unionists in this province say: "It's our job to mourn for the dead, but, by God, to fight for the living." Monuments aren't enough. Platitudes are not enough. Wringing our hands and expressing concern about our slaughtered sisters and brothers isn't enough.

There are things we can really do. There are things this government can do, like permit agricultural workers to form trade unions and to collectively bargain so they can fight for safer workplaces. There are things this government can do, like enact anti-scab legislation so that workers aren't maimed and slaughtered on their picket lines as scab buses tear through those lawful picket lines. There are things this government can do, like enhance and reinforce the right to refuse unsafe work and ensure that every worker in this province, young and old, anglophone and non-anglophone, is aware of those rights, is aware of what constitutes unsafe work in a toxic workplace and is confident that they can exercise that right without fear of retribution.

Build a monument if you want, but we'd far more meaningfully spend our time building an Ontario Labour Relations Act, building a workplace health and safety act that truly created safer workplaces and gave workers more control over those workplaces so that they could exercise their right to return home as fit as they were when they went to work that morning.

We can build a society where human good prevails over the reckless pursuit of profits. Let this be a monument to that.

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I wish to speak on the importance of Bill 79, An Act to establish the Ontario Workers' Memorial. I just want to say that I will be supporting this bill, and I want to add my congratulations to the member from London-Fanshawe.

As you know, Huron-Bruce is a rural riding, and agriculture is the driving economic force. On-farm safety is a very important issue in my riding. As many of you

know, farming, by nature, can be very hazardous. In the past, many people have lost their lives in the workforce, including the agricultural sector. In 2002, 1,597 people were injured or suffered illness. In this industry, there were 424 injured using agricultural machinery. These numbers only represent the allowed claims to WSIB. The number of filed claims is much higher, and many people never approach the WSIB. So those numbers do not reflect, in total, how many people were injured within the farming industry.

But I'm very pleased that this government has brought forward a solid commitment to improve on-farm safety by providing health and safety standards for farmers and farm workers. However, for some, prevention comes too late, and I feel it is extremely important to remember those members who have lost their lives through industry. I believe that it is a very fitting tribute to place a memorial.

I also want to bring forward that the location of the memorial, I believe, is also of importance. For the number of people who come to visit Queen's Park each day, it will be part of some of the scenery that they come to see. For the numbers of people that we have through the doors every day, it acts as a foundation for education. As we all know, real change comes about through education, so that their workplace becomes a safe place within their environment. So I bring this forward today to add my support, as well.

Just as a reminder to everyone, within my riding of Huron-Bruce we have two sites: one in Goderich and one in Port Elgin. Over the years, those memorial sites have acted as reminders to the people within my riding. As they say, if you can't remember your history, then you're bound to repeat yourself.

But it's up to us, the people who represent our constituents. We must ensure that the voices of people in the workplace, health and safety activists, surviving family members and concerned citizens are heard.

I know that in the past, a version of this bill was brought forward before the Legislature by the late Dominic Agostino, the past member for Hamilton East. If this bill is passed, it not only will signify the importance of remembering those who have lost their lives in the workforce, but it will be a wonderful tribute to our late friend and colleague.

1150

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I'll be sharing my time with the member from Mississauga East.

I'm pleased to rise today to support my colleague from London-Fanshawe in his efforts to establish a memorial commemorating those who have lost their lives in the workplace.

I remember, as a young engineer in the mid-1960s in the city of Ottawa, that we had two tragic collapses: one a building and one a bridge. I still recall the solicitor for the coroner, a brother of a former Attorney General of this province. Everything that was so important about these deaths came out during that coroner's inquest. It was so tragic, and I can recall very well today the hours that I sat during that inquest.

I support as well the bill's provision, as mentioned by the member for Huron-Bruce, that the memorial be located at or near Queen's Park, which sees thousands of visitors annually. In fact, the memorial would be a fitting site for the day of mourning that has been taking place every year to honour those who have lost their lives on the job.

When I was on council in the city of Ottawa, I believe that two years ago we had the labour unions from the city of Ottawa request the city's permission to place a monument to those workers who died building the Rideau Canal—the Irish workers, back in the 1812 war with the Americans.

This is a tribute that we must go forward with and one that is meaningful. This special day was an initiative of the Canadian Labour Congress, which chose the date to commemorate workers in Canada, and passed third reading in 1914. It is a sign of the importance of this gesture that recognition ceremonies marking that day as a day of remembrance are now held around the world, after Canada's example. We now have the opportunity to make an important next step with this monument.

Families that have lost their loved ones in this tragic way need to know that their loss is not forgotten and that their loss is shared by all of us. They need to know that we are doing our utmost to ensure that similar tragedies will be averted through our common efforts, through prevention, through education and through legislation.

Compared to some jurisdictions, Canada does not have a sterling reputation for health and safety in the workplace. For example, we lose six times the number of workers they do through workplace accidents. Clearly we have much to do in this regard.

I am encouraged that our Minister of Labour is committed to addressing workplace safety and has made this issue a number one priority. He is personally chairing the minister's action group on health and safety, an advisory body that brings together in partnership a range of experts from both business and labour to share ideas on how to reduce and eliminate workplace deaths.

On work sites, the ministry is increasing enforcement with the hiring of 25 new site inspectors, with more to come. The ministry is also committed to enforcing the Employment Standards Act, supported by measures including education, training, legislation, enforcement, and prosecutions when deemed necessary. The ministry is also looking at the extension of health and safety protection into new areas.

All these efforts are important as we work hard to reduce the rate of workplace injury and deaths in this province. I believe it is important that we recognize the lives that have been lost, as a sober reminder of the price they have paid and as a fitting memorial to their memory.

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I'd like to thank the member for Ottawa-Orléans for sharing his time to speak on such an important bill. I'm very proud to speak on and support Bill 79, An Act to establish the Ontario Workers' Memorial. It is great that my friend from London-Fanshawe has brought forward this bill, which has a strong foundation from a previous bill that

the late honourable member Dominic Agostino from Hamilton East brought forward. It was great to hear members from all three parties speak so eloquently and heartfelt about this bill.

I come from a family of labourers—construction workers, assembly line workers and heavy machinery operators—and I have been close to tragedy. Many family members and friends of the family have lost limbs or been seriously injured on the work site. I'm very proud of our government, in terms of the measures we are moving forward on in making the workplace a safer place.

Yesterday, I was with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care at the Irish Embassy pub at Yonge and Wellington, enjoying a cool beer on a beautiful day in a smoke-free environment. As you know, the municipality of Toronto has gone smoke-free. If we think back and remember, you've seen the stop-smoking commercials where we had Helen, a worker in the hospitality industry, who, through no fault of her own, having worked in a smoke-filled environment year after year, contracted cancer. We have to stop those Helen stories from happening.

I can say proudly that our government will take the onus off municipalities in terms of making them smoke-free and have a smoke-free Ontario by 2007. That is something we can all be proud of and of the many lives we will save. As we know, 16,000 Ontarians die due to tobacco every year.

What was brought up by the member from Niagara Centre around accidents in the workplace is so true: Accidents don't just happen. Imagine this about accidents: If we were to accept a rate of 99.9% where you don't have an accident and take that to the airline industry, then 99.9% of the time we wouldn't have accidents and every thousandth flight there would be an accident and a tragedy for hundreds of people.

There is so much more work to do in terms of addressing accidents—because accidents don't just happen—and it's not around common sense. Everybody thinks they've got common sense. The person driving down the highway at 160 kilometres per hour thinks they've got common sense. Common sense is not something we can live by. We have to build powers into legislation and address situations, whether they come around lighting, ventilation, whatever it may be in the workplace, so these accidents stop happening.

I'm very proud that the member for London-Fanshawe has brought forward this bill. It will be a beacon for all those who have been caused tragedy in the workplace.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Ramal, the member for London-Fanshawe, has two minutes.

Mr Ramal: I'd like to thank the members from Durham, Hamilton East, Stoney Creek, Niagara Centre, Huron-Bruce, Ottawa-Orléans and Mississauga East for speaking in support of the bill.

I'd like to make some comment to the member from Durham, who was talking about the expense to establish the memorial. I believe it's very important to honour people who give their lives, and who give their time and effort and are injured on the work site, to have something for them around this building, around this assembly.

As my colleagues from Huron-Bruce and Ottawa-Orléans mentioned, many visitors come to this place on a daily basis. I think it would be a very important place to remind people about the people who gave their lives to support our economy and about people who continue working in factories, nursing homes and hospitals, construction sites, wherever they work. I think it's very important to honour those people who gave their lives to support us and those who continue to support our economy.

I also want to speak to the member from Niagara Centre, who talked about bad employers. I think our government is doing its best to crack down on bad employers through education, training and sometimes prosecution, if necessary, to make sure all workplaces in this province are safe and secure. It's important to us and to our government to make sure all people who go to work on a daily basis—as he mentioned, who wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning and have to be at work by 6 and sometimes work 12 hours on a daily basis. Those people need and deserve respect.

Therefore, after listening to all speakers, I hope I get the support of this House to establish a memorial in honour of people who were killed and injured on the work site.

The Deputy Speaker: The time allowed for private members' public business has now expired.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS AND SECURITY GUARDS AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES ENQUÊTEURS PRIVÉS ET LES GARDIENS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We shall deal first with ballot item number 23, standing in the name of Mr Dunlop.

Mr Dunlop has moved second reading of Bill 88, An Act to amend the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members and deal with this after the next ballot item.

ONTARIO WORKERS' MEMORIAL ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE MONUMENT COMMÉMORATIF DES TRAVAILLEURS DE L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item 24, standing in the name of Mr Ramal.

Mr Ramal has moved second reading of Bill 79, An Act to establish the Ontario Workers' Memorial.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm asking if we can move the bill to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, if that's possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS AND SECURITY GUARDS AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES ENQUÊTEURS PRIVÉS ET LES GARDIENS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item 23. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will please stand.

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Horwath, Andrea	Peters, Steve
Barrett, Toby	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Kormos, Peter	Qaadri, Shafiq
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Runciman, Robert W.
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Ruprecht, Tony
Cordiano, Joseph	Mauro, Bill	Sandals, Liz
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Scott, Laurie
Di Cocco, Caroline	McNeely, Phil	Sergio, Mario
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Smith, Monique
Dunlop, Garfield	Mitchell, Carol	Smitherman, George
Fonseca, Peter	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Sterling, Norman W.
Gerretsen, John	O'Toole, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please stand.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 48; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, this bill will be referred to—

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Can the bill be sent to justice and social policy, please?

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Dunlop has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on justice and social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

All matters pursuant to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1209 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SUNSET HEIGHTS PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): It is with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize and congratulate Oshawa's Sunset Heights Public School on 50 years of education and service to our community.

When Sunset Heights was built in 1954, it housed 150 students, with Mr Sutton as principal. The north wing was added in 1958, and the library, gym and intermediate wing, along with the music room, were added in 1972. Currently, Sunset Heights has over 480 students, under the guidance of Principal Sutherland.

The school has always accommodated local community groups such as Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, park league soccer and baseball, along with adult volleyball, in the facilities. Over the past years, staff continue to focus on key aspects of technology, mathematics and literacy, along with teaching a full ministry and board curriculum.

A strong emphasis of community safety and security at the school is supported and maintained by the school's active SCC, led by Chris Dart.

The staff and local communities support a variety of co-curricular activities including intramural and house leagues, band, choir, art and drama, chess and running clubs, along with outdoor nature activities such as tree planting and a trout classroom hatchery. There is also an annual teacher-student hockey game, which I've had the opportunity to sub into in the past couple of years.

I would like to ask all members to join me in congratulating the students, staff and community of Sunset Heights Public School on 50 years of giving.

STRATFORD FESTIVAL

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Tuesday night was truly a midsummer night's dream in my hometown as the Stratford Festival marked the opening of their 52nd season with Shakespeare's most beloved comedy. It was an exciting production that I describe as the Bard meets Cirque du Soleil.

Drawing audiences of more than 600,000 patrons each year, the festival season now runs from April to November, and includes a wonderful array of 14 productions, including six from the Bard himself, offered at our four theatres. If that were not enough, the season also includes a full program of fringe activities, including concert recitals, discussion sessions and readings by celebrated authors.

I was very proud to attend the traditional opening-night gala dinner and watch as my colleagues the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Tourism and Recreation announced $200,000 from each of their respective ministries to assist the festival in target marketing to both families with children and patrons from Michigan. Joined by the Minister of Finance, the

evening was a resounding success. Of note, all three already have plans to return to Stratford this season.

Our government, despite fiscal challenges, is committed to the arts for all the right reasons. Our culture helps bind us together as a community, as well as providing the basis of vibrant economic growth.

I entreat all members to visit the Stratford Festival this season, and I stand ready to assist them.

Finally, I want to commend artistic director Richard Monette, and executive director Antoni Cimolino, for the creation of yet another wonderful season, for truly it is "such stuff as dreams are made of."

AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): On May 18, I—and I'm sure all Ontario's farmers—was stunned to see the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's budget cut by $128 million.

Since then, the minister and his staff have explained this—the largest cut of any ministry and the largest agriculture cut in history, I believe—as simply the end of one-time special funded programs. Minister Peters is on record as saying programs like Healthy Futures and BSE relief are included in this group.

The last time I checked, the borders were still closed to live cattle, and the beef and dairy farmers were still suffering extreme financial hardship. Was one-time special funding sufficient? I don't think so.

By publicly acknowledging that the Healthy Futures program will not be funded, the minister has turned his back on research and development initiatives in agriculture. In my time as Minister of Agriculture, Healthy Futures funded research on products made from tobacco that actually added to public safety through its ability to detect E coli bacteria in meat.

This minister couldn't convince his urban colleagues that the tobacco industry deserved consistent funding. Now it's obvious he can't convince them that these farmers deserve R&D money either. Both of these programs need to be funded or replaced. They are too important to the future of agriculture.

Through acceptance of this budget cut, Minister Peters has turned his back on agriculture and shown he is incapable of representing its importance at the cabinet table. I urge him to speak up immediately so that these programs get the money they deserve, and to be a stronger voice for farm families in this province.

BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased and proud to rise in the House today to highlight the month of June as Brain Injury Awareness Month.

A personal friend of mine and a constituent from Niagara Falls, Jacqui Graham, suffers from brain injury due to a serious car accident that occurred 19 years ago. Jackie has had to totally readjust her life to live with the permanent scars of a brain injury and has become a spokesperson for the brain injury association.

"Brain injury can hurt forever" is a phrase that is becoming synonymous with the month of June as it becomes Brain Injury Awareness Month. Brain injuries kill 11,000 Canadians each year and permanently disable many more. It is the leading cause of death and disability for Canadians under the age of 45.

Precautions, such as the proper use of seat belts, child care seats, correctly fitting bicycle helmets and the avoidance of alcohol use while operating motor vehicles, can go a long way toward the prevention of brain injury.

I urge all the members of the House to reach out to the brain injury awareness and support groups in their communities in June as we all support Brain Injury Awareness Month.

ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's my pleasure to rise in the House to recognize Sunday, June 6, as D-Day, as we all know it, and to extend congratulations to teachers David Robinson and Nancy Hamer Strahl of Port Perry High School, along with Michael Strahl of Courtice Secondary School and Brent Birchard of Anderson Collegiate.

With the help of the entire community and dedicated volunteers such as author and councillor Lynn Phillip Hodgson, they organized a trip for D-Day ceremonies in France on Sunday, June 6. Approximately 150 students will be attending. Geoff Taylor of the Royal Canadian Legion in Port Perry was also among the strong supporters of the project. There was extensive media coverage of the trip, which was a credit to the teachers, students and community working together.

One of the highlights will occur when the students place a "we remember" time capsule at the Juno Beach Centre. I might add that this memorial was supported by a $1-million contribution from the Ernie Eves government and the people of Ontario. I would like to congratulate the legion in Port Perry and its president Rory Thompson, as well as the Royal Canadian Legion in Bowmanville and its president, Peter Puleston, on the legion's support for this trip for D-Day.

At this time I cannot help but remember the veterans in my riding, such as the late Norm Baker and the late Fred West. They were living examples of the dedication and contribution these veterans have made. On the 60th anniversary, D-Day is a time to pay tribute to those who served, especially those who paid the supreme sacrifice. We will remember them.

VISUDYNE TREATMENT

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Let me tell you about Margaret Boychuk. She's 83 years old. She lives down on the Kingsway in Dain City, south Welland. She's lived there for 53 years now, raised her family there and in her senior years as a widow she enjoyed working in her garden, rototilling the ground.

The problem is, she is going blind. She has wet macular degeneration. She can be treated. She went to one of Niagara's leading ophthalmologists, Mario Ventresca, and he indicated that she indeed can save her sight if he utilizes the Visudyne treatment for macular degeneration at the cost of $2,750 per treatment. She received her first treatment in the latter part of April of this year. She may need as many as five more.

The problem is that Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government cares not about Mrs Boychuk's eyesight, nor about other seniors who suffer from wet macular degeneration, because this Liberal government has told Mrs Boychuk that she is on her own, that the Liberal privatization of health care has left her without any access to OHIP recovery for the cost of saving her sight.

Don't tell this woman that she has to resolve your deficit, Mr McGuinty. She has paid taxes all her life. She has paid lots of taxes. By God, Mrs Boychuk has worked hard all her life. All she expects is to see the medicare, the public health care she helped build sustained for her. This government has a lot to account for.

1340

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): Since being elected in October, I've had the opportunity to meet with school principals, teachers and students in various schools in my riding of Scarborough Southwest. With the budget announcement and a number of announcements made last week by the Minister of Education, I can now say to these individuals that the war against public education is over.

Funding for public education is being dramatically increased in our four-year plan for change. In my riding of Scarborough Southwest and all across the province, there is an overwhelming feeling of co-operation as our government prepares to reverse the Tory trend of low student achievement, crumbling schools and high dropout rates.

I have come to know school principals, such as Kevin Malcolm at St Theresa Shrine elementary school and Don Snow of Mason Road Junior Public School, and many other educators, as well as their students. I'm certain that they are happy with the investments being made in our community: an $854-million increase in public education funding for 2004-05; more teachers; additional help for students in need, especially those in ESL.

Educators are telling me that they are now happy to put the past behind them and are looking forward to a positive future of enhanced student achievement in public schools.

Finally, I want to end with a small quote from Benjamin Disraeli, who once said, "Individuals may form communities, but it is institutions alone that can create a nation." Public education is one of those treasured institutions in this province that gives us the best students, the best citizens and the best workers.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I'd like to take this opportunity to pledge my support of Minister Sorbara's decision to allocate $106 million to social assistance recipients in the budget he delivered on May 18.

The need for this increase in social funding is reflected in my riding of Mississauga East, where a high percentage of our case work is related to the Ontario disability support program and Ontario Works. The calculated figure of a 3% increase to the basic allowance and shelter allowance will ultimately help those most in need. Our continued commitment to those who are most vulnerable is an expression of our commitment to social services.

Fellow members, let us recall that the previous government did not deem it necessary to increase the level of funding to those most in need. This increase to ODSP and Ontario Works is the first in 11 years. If we consider this from an economic standpoint, as inflation and the cost of living increased throughout the 1990s, Ontario's most vulnerable citizens were left with an even greater hole to dig themselves out of. This was—and I stress "was"—a crying shame.

Thanks to my fellow members, Minister Sorbara and Minister Pupatello, our government is now working hard to change this social disparity. On behalf of my constituents who are most in need of our help, I thank our government for its commitment to increasing funding for social supports.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I rise today to tell you how proud I am of being a member of the Liberal Party and, in particular, this government. Today I started off my day by reading an article on the results of a Sun Media-Léger Marketing poll. What did it say? It verified what we've been saying since the election and why Ontarians chose change in October. The Sun Media poll said Canadians say health care is the number one issue.

That's why we're investing in health care. That's why we're hiring 8,000 more new nurses, full-time employment. That is why we're going to provide nine new MRIs and CT scanners. I'm going to suggest to you that a good place to locate one would be in the riding of Brant. We'll invest in our community health centres, 150 new ones, primary care, mental health services, long-term care and home care.

Senior citizens are going to be benefiting in health care from the budget we're putting forward. I want to thank the Minister of Health for his commitment to making sure that our senior citizens are definitely taken care of, contrary to what other people are trying to spin around here.

We're going to make these investments. Why? Because people want them, and they're telling us not only in the federal election but in the provincial election that health care is the number one priority. That's exactly what we're doing, and we're going to continue to do that.

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the report of the Integrity Commissioner concerning the review of expense claims under the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act, 2002, for the period of April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Thursday, June 3, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

Those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1346 to 1351.

The Speaker: Mr Duncan has moved government notice of motion 110. All those in favour, please rise to be checked by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Racco, Mario G.
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Sergio, Mario
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Mauro, Bill	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Smitherman, George
Craitor, Kim	McNeely, Phil	Sorbara, Greg
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Van Bommel, Maria
Dombrowsky, Leona	Orazietti, David	Watson, Jim
Duncan, Dwight	Peters, Steve	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peterson, Tim	Wong, Tony C.
Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra	

The Speaker: All those against, please rise to be checked by the Clerk.

Nays

Baird, John R.	Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Kormos, Peter	Scott, Laurie
Bisson, Gilles	Marchese, Rosario	Sterling, Norman W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Martel, Shelley	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	
Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 50; the nays are 16.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PROTECTION OF EASTERN WOLF

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to announce that this government is fulfilling its commitment to increase protection for the eastern wolf in Algonquin Provincial Park. In meeting this commitment, we are contributing to the preservation of Ontario's rich biodiversity and a healthy, natural environment.

I am pleased to announce that I have signed a regulation to create a closed, year-round season for the hunting, chasing and trapping of wolves and coyotes in and around Algonquin Park, to take effect on July 1. The proposal for this ban received overwhelming public support when posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry last March. The practice of chasing wolves or coyotes with dogs both in and around the park is also discontinued. We have extended the ban to include coyotes to further protect the eastern wolf, since it can be mistaken for a coyote.

A closed season on hunting and trapping is just one aspect of protecting the eastern wolf, because Ontario's ecosystems are very complex. In managing wildlife, we must consider a range of factors, including interactions among different and competing species and abundance and quality of habitat. For that reason, I am proposing that the eastern wolf be assigned a provincial status of "special concern" on the new species at risk in Ontario list.

To put all this into context, it's important to note that the eastern wolf has lost 58% of its historical range in Canada and is now extinct in the Atlantic provinces and the eastern United States. Algonquin Park is now the largest protected area for the eastern wolf in North America.

Wolves play an essential role in the Algonquin ecosystem. Wolves are also one of Algonquin's most enduring images and the focus of the park's popular interpretive programs, including the renowned howl evenings. This action is the first step in ensuring that future generations of park visitors will be able to marvel at the sound of the wolf howls, and I would encourage every member to experience that this summer if they can.

I have also directed my ministry to develop a province-wide wolf management program. Wolves remain one of the last unregulated species in Ontario, and I believe the wolf deserves the same protection and management we provide for other species.

We are proud to make this significant contribution to protecting the wolves of Algonquin and, in doing so, further preserve the rich biodiversity and magnificent natural heritage of our province.

NURSES

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I want to say right from the get-go

that this speech should be checked against delivery. It could vary very slightly from the distributed copy.

I'm proud to speak to the House today about a major initiative that will help us rebuild and transform health care in Ontario. I'm going to talk to you about an investment contained in our recent budget, the Plan for Change, that will deliver on our commitment to support Ontario nurses and bring more nurses the opportunity of full-time employment. I'm going to talk about another significant step forward in our comprehensive strategy to restore the foundations of nursing in this province.

First, I want to take a moment to speak about our plan to transform health care in Ontario. Our recent budget fuels this plan because it invests in much-needed changes in our system to deliver much greater access to the quality services that Ontarians cherish. This is a plan that finds its roots in the great work of Roy Romanow and is a reflection of our government's commitment to enhance the most essential public service: health care.

Our transformation agenda is about a drive to provide vital health resources at the community level, as close to people's homes as possible. I spoke the other day in the House about five significant investment areas critical to improving the health of Ontarians, and I would like to briefly review these now.

The first is our commitment to enhance, by $406 million of new investment, long-term care, including $191 million that is targeted to hire 2,000 employees to enhance the care of our loved ones in existing long-term-care beds, and the balance to expand long-term care by some 3,700 beds.

Second is an investment this year of $100 million in home care, to enable Ontarians to have the option of receiving care in the comfort and dignity of their homes.

Third, we're making a major transformational investment in public health by making a commitment on the part of Ontario to take back to 75%, over four years, the amount of funding that is provided for the provision of essential public health services in our province.

Fourth is an extraordinary investment of some $600 million over four years to enhance primary care, specifically to deliver on our commitment to create 150 family health teams, delivering multidisciplinary teams of health care providers close to where people live.

The fifth of these is a $65-million commitment to rebuild mental health and addiction treatment that has not seen a new penny since 1992.

But there is more: our investments to bring down wait times for surgeries that people require, such as cataracts, hip and knee replacements, cancer, cardiac, and nine new MRI and CT sites over the course of the next year. These investments will largely benefit the health and quality of life of Ontarians and especially, in all of these cases, direct targets at our seniors, who need all the help we can offer.

1400

Nurses are essential to our success in all of these areas. Our government believes that health care really is the ultimate human endeavour. It is where people deliver care to other people. That's why an essential element of our Plan for Change is investing in critical human capacity in our health care system. Our government has a plan to support, nurture and create environments where we have the right people in place and the support they need to deliver the best possible care.

Nurses are the very heart and soul of our health care system. We need nurses here in Ontario to help us rebuild health care in Ontario. We are going to make Ontario the greatest place for nurses to work. We are going to restore the foundations of nursing in this province.

Our budget commits to creating 8,000 new full-time nursing positions in the province, and I want to tell members of the House that we are making tremendous strides toward delivering on this commitment.

Earlier today at Toronto East General Hospital I had the opportunity to announce that the McGuinty government is investing $50 million on a strategy to provide 1,000 nursing graduates with jobs on the front line. With this investment, we will hire new nursing graduates into full-time positions, and we will provide them with mentoring support and the guidance of our experienced senior nurses. This investment will enable us to recruit as many as 1,000 new graduates this year in our hospitals and long-term-care facilities.

The reality is, we need new graduates desperately to step into the shoes of nurses who are fast approaching retirement. New graduates need sufficient time to acquire the knowledge, skills and experience they need to practise independently, and today we are buying hundreds of thousands of those hours to give them the necessary experience.

For our health care system to grow and thrive, we need the energy and enthusiasm of new nursing graduates, and we need the knowledge and expertise of experienced nurses to nurture new nurses and to provide the high-quality care that Ontarians deserve.

With 30,000 Ontario nurses over the age of 50, decreasing the loss of nurses due to early retirement is absolutely crucial. But we want to help keep those nurses working and making a positive contribution to health care in the province of Ontario. Part of this $50-million investment will support late-career nurses and nurses who have been injured on the job.

These initiatives will provide opportunities for senior nurses and nurses who have injured their backs to apply their invaluable expertise in less physically demanding but equally rewarding roles and environments. Nurses who are injured and on disability also have a wealth of experience and skill that we need and that we must transfer to our nursing grads. They are often willing to work in their chosen profession but need to make a contribution in a less physically demanding environment. That's what we're providing for. That's why some of this investment will go toward bringing injured nurses back into the workforce by providing them with rewarding alternate roles—for example, practising in a primary health care environment.

We will also use this $50-million investment to help nursing schools better prepare their students through the purchase of advanced clinical training equipment. This is hardware and software simulation equipment that actually mimics the clinical environment. This will give our new graduates the hands-on skills they need to prepare for the challenges of delivering front-line care, before they are in a real patient care environment.

We will put an end to the understaffed, overworked conditions that have taken a toll on nurses these past number of years. To do this, obviously, we're working hard to deliver on our commitment to bring 8,000 new full-time nurses to the province of Ontario over the course of the next four years.

On that point, we are making great strides toward delivering on this commitment. Let's look at what we've accomplished during our first seven months in office. In February, we invested $25 million in 33 large hospitals to create 400 new full-time positions for nurses. In April, we announced a further $25 million for 122 small- and medium-sized hospitals to create 400 new nursing positions, and those dollars are flowing in announcements over the course of the next two days. In May, we announced a comprehensive action plan to improve the quality of care in our long-term-care homes, including adding at least 600 new nurses to a complement of a full 2,000 new staff positions to provide care to our loved ones who are living out their days in long-term-care facilities. With today's announcement, we will see at last 1,000 new nursing positions created.

That means that just over halfway through year one, we have made the necessary investments to create 2,400 new full-time nursing positions in hospitals and long-term-care centres all across this vast province. This year, 2004-05, will be a year when we can mark even more progress toward our commitment of 8,000 new full-time nurses.

Nursing is about more than just a job; it is a career. Nursing is a knowledge profession. Every moment of every day, nurses make a difference in the lives of patients, families and communities. Nurses give their very best to the people of this province.

In return, the McGuinty government is determined to give nurses the very best possible working environment and the professional opportunities to see them thrive. We plan to make Ontario the best place to work for nurses. Our government has a plan, and we're acting on it. The steps I've outlined today are important steps toward rebuilding the foundations of nursing in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I'm pleased to respond and to thank the Minister of Health for recognizing that nurses are the heart and soul of our health care system, and the investments we had started in the previous government, the commitment to health care, by increasing over $10 million in the health care system.

We're going to watch closely. It's a welcome first step: full-time positions for nursing. I was happy to see that as well as big hospitals, small and medium-sized hospitals are also going to be included in the full-time nursing positions; often they're left out. This is the first step in your pledge of 8,000 new nurses. Being a nurse myself, I can certainly appreciate that.

I know that we both attended the RNAO conference this year, which told us that our graduates of this class are leaving now. Hopefully we can retain them, and I hope we are actively recruiting nurses who have gone to the States before.

I want to thank Elizabeth Witmer, the past Minister of Health, for her investments in nursing and to implementing the nursing task force, and Doris Grinspun, who observed that "The province is poised to lose 6,000 RNs to retirement or death in 2004, and we cannot afford to lose a single RN," for all the work she's done on behalf of that.

I also want to comment on the minister's investment in long-term care. The 20,000 long-term-care beds the previous government had created in Ontario: I'm happy to see that the Liberal government is putting in the operating dollars to hopefully fulfill that. I also want to compliment him on the community health centres. We spoke last night about the importance they have in communities and the investment they're going to be making.

I want to ask about the investment to bring down wait times for people requiring surgery—cataracts, hip and knee replacements, cancer, cardiac—and for MRI and CT sites over the next year. I want to know when we can hear what that real time is. Is it a year that these people have to wait? Is it going to be brought down to three months? We need to have some real-time values on that so we know.

I also want to comment on the delisting of chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy that occurred in the budget that's going on the slippery slope to privatization—

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): And the new tax.

Ms Scott: —and the new health care tax premium, taking money out of people's pockets. Does that give them a family doctor? They're going to pay extra health care premiums, but does that mean they have a family doctor? It's a welcome first step. Being a nurse myself, and for all nurses, I certainly thank you for implementing and putting in some money for full-time positions. It's greatly needed, and we hope you progress further down that slope.

PROTECTION OF EASTERN WOLF

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I'm very appreciative of the opportunity to comment on the minister's statements. What the minister may have done is condemn the fringe packs of wolves in Algonquin Park. Let me explain. The ministry's own science specifically states that inbreeding with coyotes is having a larger impact than anything else on the population in that area.

The original report that came out on the Algonquin wolves specifically stated that up to the 1960s, 25% of the wolves inside the park were harvested by park rangers. It also went on to state that it had no impact on

the population there. The problem in that area was that up to 15% were being harvested outside. For those who don't understand the issue, what takes place is that the wolves follow the food source outside the provincial park during the winter months. Because the deer move outside the park, the wolves follow them out into private areas where they're hunted at that time. What needed to take place was effectively to complete the habitat prey study in that area. That was number one.

Number two on that same issue was the forestry practices within Algonquin Park. The forestry practices needed to be changed. There were studies. There were meetings with the Algonquin Forest Authority to look at those issues to retain the deer and promote beaver growth within the park, and retain the wolves inside the park and they would be protected forever. But that has not taken place.

In regard to the province-wide management program, it's certainly not going to be well received by a lot of individuals, including the agricultural community. I've already had a number of e-mails on that, asking if the predator compensation in these areas is going to be increased as well because of the expectation of more predation on farm animals, including sheep and cattle etc.

I think that everyone wants to protect the wolves. If they had taken the proper steps rather than quickly react, we would all be able to benefit from proper management in that area.

1410

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I guess kind of a half-applause to the Minister of Natural Resources. We're not going to say it's a bad thing that you basically signed the regulations to create a closed year-round season for the hunting and chasing and trapping of wolves and coyotes in Algonquin Provincial Park, but as you well know, there are many other species of animals out there that quite frankly—

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Like the woodland caribou.

Mr Bisson: Let me get to it. There are a number of other species that are at risk. In fact, just this morning at our caucus meeting, when we were discussing this very issue, one of the—

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): In a full discussion.

Mr Bisson: Full discussion. One of the items we talked about was the endangered species called the woodland caribou. For example, in our platform we had called to move on that because, you would remember, the Environmental Commissioner, back in 2002, had actually condemned the previous government for not moving to protect the woodland caribou. I would call on the minister to follow through on what was our commitment and your support at that time to make sure we protect other endangered species.

NURSES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the Minister of Health's statement with respect to health care initiatives and nursing, I've got to tell this government and this minister that no one believes your promises any more. No one. You folks have a serious credibility gap and you can't overcome it. Just take a look at the government track record.

Here is the government track record since being elected: The government promised during the election they were going to maintain the freeze on hydro rates till 2007; they broke that promise last fall. The government said they wouldn't build 6,000 houses on the Oak Ridges moraine; they broke that promise last fall. The government said they were going to have a 20% reduction in auto rates; that promise is being broken every day. The government said there were going to be no new tax increases, and what did we see in the budget? The government said they were going to stop discriminating against autistic children over six, and the government in a shameful fashion keeps on discriminating against those same children.

This government has a track record that is now well established of breaking promises, and that has caused this government a serious credibility gap. If anyone needs any evidence to show that Ontarians don't believe this government when they make promises, you just have to look at the Decima poll that was released last weekend, where the Liberals are now down at 32% in Ontario, and we and the Conservatives are now at 29%. Or you could look at the free fall of Paul Martin in Ontario, for he is falling daily because people are attaching him to the McGuinty Liberals.

You can look at Paul Martin's own comments, May 31, 2004 in Saskatoon. It says, "Paul Martin took another shot at the promise-breaking Ontario Liberals on Monday, saying politicians have a duty to plan for the worst." He said the following: "It's not enough to say how you're going to be able to pay for them under the best of circumstances. You've got to say how you're going to pay for them under very differing circumstances.... If I come to you and ask you to vote for me because I'm going to do certain things, and I don't do them, then I have broken faith." That's Paul Martin, cousin of the Ontario Liberals.

The minister said in his comments today, "This is a plan that finds its roots in the great work of Roy Romanow." Roy Romanow is probably rolling over, watching what the Liberal government is doing here in Ontario health care. Roy Romanow said to the private sector, "Come and show me where there is any evidence that private health care is more effective, more cost-efficient and provides better health outcomes." There was no evidence that came forward to prove that.

You would think in Ontario, then, that this government would maintain the promises it made for publicly administered, publicly funded health care. What is this government doing? A P3 hospital in Brampton and in Ottawa, which are privately financed by a consortium and are going to cost taxpayers and people in those communities even more when they're finished; a private CAT scan clinic; private MRIs that this government

hasn't cancelled; competitive bidding in home care for the private sector—not a cancellation of that; and the most recent breaking of a promise when the government said they weren't going to cut health care services—the cutting, the delisting, the privatization of eye care, chiropractic care and physiotherapy—which leads to two-tier medicine in the province of Ontario, which enforces two-tier medicine, which makes it even worse.

I said at the outset and I'll say it again: The problem the Liberals have is a credibility gap. They have broken too many promises, and no one believes this government with respect to what they say any more.

ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

ANNIVERSAIRE DU JOUR J

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes to commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day and the Canadian soldiers who fought for our freedom.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent as requested for D-Day? Agreed.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): There are many definitions of leadership, but my favourite comes from a little cemetery outside of Caen, in the Normandy countryside of France. On top of one of the graves in a cemetery there is a cross, and it bears the following inscription, which reads: "Leadership is wisdom and courage and a great carelessness of self." As the 60th anniversary of D-Day approaches, our generation and our children's generation want to thank the wartime generation for its wisdom, its courage and its great carelessness of self.

On behalf of Ontarians, 12 million strong, I want to thank all veterans and their families for their leadership. They led us to freedom. They led us to democracy. They led us not only in war, but to peace. Their sacrifices, their carelessness of self spared our generation and our children's generation from oppression and war.

All this week, communities across Ontario have been recalling and celebrating the bravery and heroism of the men and women of our armed forces in World War II and the resolve and sacrifice of the nation which stood foursquare behind them. That was a generation that found itself on the fault line of history, and it rose magnificently to the challenge, cementing Canadians' reputation as a brave and a just people. These men and women made a brave choice: Rather than ignore tyranny and injustice somewhere over there, they chose to cross an ocean, hurl themselves at an enemy and liberate captive nations. And in doing so they crossed another ocean: the one that separates those who stand by and watch evil grow and those who act for the good of all. More than 1.7 million Canadians served in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War, and more than 100,000 gave their lives on the battlefield. That is a debt that can never adequately be repaid.

I say to our veterans and their families: Grâce à vous, et en raison des sacrifices que vous avez faits, l'Ontario est fort et libre. Because of you and the sacrifices you made, Ontario is strong and free today. It was on your watch that we faced our greatest threat, and it was on D-Day, 60 years ago, that we first and finally turned the corner to victory, peace and prosperity. On behalf of the government and the people of Ontario, I want to say thank you for doing so much for so many.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's my honour to stand and make a few comments on the 60th anniversary of D-Day.

Whether it's in this House, at memorials throughout or in Normandy itself, on June 6 we will hear many moving tributes recalling the bravery of the tens of thousands of our troops who landed on or parachuted behind the beaches of Normandy.

1420

I don't want to recount those stories today, because I know that veterans throughout our country will be doing a much better job this coming weekend. Rather, I'd like to ask members of this House and those watching these proceedings to pause for a moment and reflect on what you think when you hear about these memorials. Too often my generation and generations after have taken veterans for granted. It happens for the simple reason that we take their victories for granted and often take freedom for granted.

D-Day has become a defining moment in our memory—the memory of the Second World War. In the course of a few hours, thousands of Canadian and Allied troops had jumped from planes and landing craft straight into the fire of the German occupation army. In one single day, a quiet French province exploded into a crowded front line. Several million men from Canada, the US, Britain and other countries had left their homes behind to pass through those beaches and liberate Europe. We know that hundreds of thousands did not return.

But still, we've grown up with books, movies and stories that make it seem as though it was inevitable that the Axis powers, and all they stood for, would be beaten. But winning was not inevitable. We know that it wasn't, because celebration of the D-Day victory hides the memory of many defeats and near-run victories that were fought with the same heroism. Canadians were at the forefront in many of those: Hong Kong; the Battle of Britain; Dieppe; the Battle of Caen; Operations Totalize and Tractable; the Battle of the Atlantic. All of those were defeats for Canadians or victories so costly that no sane person could truly celebrate their memory. Winning was neither inevitable nor easy. If I may say so, the fact that the victory was so obviously worth it in hindsight obscures the pain that it took to get there.

History books often speak of Canada's contribution to the war effort, and they proudly recite the numbers. Over a million enlisted. Canada sent hundreds of warships and

hundreds of merchantmen to fight in the Battle of the Atlantic. Our pilots played a key role in the air war and here at home. The Commonwealth air training plan trained thousands of pilots and made victories like the Battle of Britain possible.

But "contribution" is so shallow a word. Even speaking of sacrifice cheapens it somehow. Although we are still a tiny country by population by the world's standards, far from the front lines, Canada lost over 45,000 people. But I don't think we really appreciate just how massive each sacrifice was unless we stop and take a closer look at those cold statistics. Every Canadian enlisted was a family member taken from his or her community for months, years or forever. Every Canadian lost really was a lost life, with parents, friends, spouses, colleagues, even children, all left wondering what might have been. Every permanent injury was a scar, a reminder of trauma, a disability.

I think D-Day is celebrated more than any other anniversary because, as the Premier said, it marked a clear and positive turning point. After D-Day, everything gained was liberated ground.

But it's easy, with the passage of time, to lose appreciation for just how massive the price was. We will all tell ourselves today that our veterans made sacrifices for our freedom, but I don't think we'll appreciate the freedom gained unless we truly stop and make an effort to imagine that each sacrifice is more than just another casualty.

He was speaking of a very different war, but I think it's worth stealing Thomas Paine's words here. He wrote, "What we obtain too cheaply, we esteem too lightly."

Mr Speaker, it has been a pleasure to say something this afternoon.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): June 6, 1944, known to us as D-Day, marked the beginning of the end of the Nazi occupation of western Europe. As we all know, Canadian troops played a pivotal role in this turning point in the war, an event that set in motion a series of victories that culminated 11 months later in the Allied victory of World War II.

Unified in their purpose to liberate France and the rest of western Europe, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, comprising 14,000 young Canadian soldiers—young men, sons, brothers, husbands of our fellow Canadians—landed on Juno Beach and fought a fierce and frightening battle against the Nazi forces. The Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force also aided in this crucial mission.

With their victory at Juno Beach, the Canadians helped the Allies in breaking through the Atlantic wall, the occupiers' first line of defence. The Canadians, at the end of the day, were at the forefront of the Allies' rescue of western Europe from the Nazis. We are very proud of them.

In the words of British historian John Keegan, "At the end of the day," the Canadian 3rd Division's "forward elements stood deeper into France than those of any other division that was part of Operation Overlord, the Allied attack to regain France." He goes on to say, "This is an accomplishment in which the whole nation should take considerable pride. Embodying the virtues of courage and determination, the members of the 3rd Division were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice," a sacrifice that none of us here can even begin to imagine, their well-being and lives for the principles of democracy and humanity. By the end of D-Day, many did make this sacrifice. In the operation to capture and secure the Normandy coastline, Canadians suffered 1,074 casualties, which included 359 young lost lives.

For the contribution made by members of the Canadian armed forces who fought on D-Day—Canadians representing all segments of this country and society—they have been thanked ever since that fateful day, June 6, 1944. I'm sure we all agree that no words can thank them enough for their sacrifice.

On a personal note, let me say that I, along with my colleague Michael Prue, quite frequently attend branch 10 on Pape Avenue in my riding. We recently celebrated the very first—and it will become an annual event—veterans' day, where we came together at branch 10 and celebrated and honoured the veterans from all the wars—we have fewer and fewer left with us.

They came in wheelchairs, on crutches, by foot, and on buses from Sunnybrook Hospital. It was a very moving experience, where we danced and sang together. We celebrated and thanked them for their sacrifices for all of us. At that event was George McKeil. I'm going to single George out. He won a Governor General's caring citizen award, nominated by Michael Prue. As a veteran, he's still very involved in the community.

Last week, I also participated in a moving ceremony at Danforth Tech, in my riding, for the unveiling of the newly restored and majestic stained glass windows that were erected in the school in 1948, dedicated to teachers and students of the school who served in World War II. As of March 1945, Danforth Tech had up to 2,235 enlisted—a great and large sacrifice in that community and that school.

In closing, I would just like to say, as we prepare to commemorate D-Day, let us remember the role these Canadians played in sacrificing their lives to restore and bring back democracy to us and to the world. As we go forward, let's remember what they sacrificed, what they lost their lives for on behalf of all of us, as we continue to participate in this great democracy that they preserved for us.

1430

HANSARD REPORTING SERVICE

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): On Tuesday, June 1, 2004, the member for Burlington, Mr Jackson, raised a point of order bringing to the attention of the House his view that the printed Hansard for Thursday, May 20, 2004, contained a correction that caused him to question the degree to which statements made in the House can be altered on their way to the final version of

Hansard. Specifically, the member queried whether there have been any changes in the policy relating to the ability of a member to alter Hansard.

I want to deal first with the request for an explanation of what the member for Burlington referred to as "changes in the ability for members to change what is put in Hansard." The very simple answer is that there has been no change. Hansard continues, as it has in the past, to act upon members' requests only in the case that Hansard has actually made a mistake in the transcription. Hansard does not allow members to make corrections to their own remarks otherwise.

In the case at hand, it was pointed out that on the date in question the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Mr Gerretsen, used the phrase, "What we are doing couldn't be further from the truth," but that in the printed version he is recorded as having said, "What the member is suggesting couldn't be further from the truth." I have checked into this matter and find that both phrases were used in succession by the minister and that Hansard did edit the remarks to remove the first phrase.

The editing practices of our Hansard branch are derived from Westminster practice and call upon editors to make certain corrections in certain circumstances. Two of the cases where Hansard will edit are: false starts and repetitions; and references that are obvious misstatements understood by all to have been just that. In this case, the statement made by the minister was judged by the Hansard editors to be: (1) a false start after which the member stopped and rephrased his opening remarks, and (2) a verbal mistake mentally corrected by those listening. The member for Burlington made reference to the latter of these in his point of order and I would venture to say that the reaction by many members in the House at the time of the "misstatement" would confirm it to have been understood as such.

As I am sure members can appreciate, the editing of Hansard requires the exercise of a great deal of judgment in converting speech to text. This ensures that the text in its final form is clear and comprehensible. Such judgment is exercised regularly according to established policy and practice and without influence from anyone. This, I believe, is as it should be and as all members would expect. In the case at hand, the Hansard editors employed their usual standards within the bounds of our usual practice. There have been no changes to any of the policies and procedures governing Hansard editing, and the House can be assured that Hansard remains, as always, apolitical and impartial in its reporting.

In closing I want to indicate that next week members will find on their desks a one-page document summarizing Hansard editing conventions which may assist in better understanding what those conventions are.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I have a question for the Premier. I want to read a quote from today's Ottawa Citizen in the column by Randall Denley, your friend and mine. It says, "It's great to see Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty championing democracy, but it's a bit like closing the barn door after you've set the barn on fire. McGuinty said Tuesday that some Ontarians are 'cynical' or 'disillusioned' about politics. No doubt. Do you think it could have"—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'm going to exercise the same restraint as yesterday. I don't want any shouting across when members are asking their questions. Please continue.

Mr Baird: He didn't work in Mike Harris's office, I say to the Minister of Tourism.

"No doubt. Do you think it could have something to do with politicians who"—unparliamentary word—"to get elected?"

You voted for the Taxpayer Protection Act. You signed a commitment to hold a referendum if you chose to raise taxes. After the huge, unprecedented and angry outcry from taxpayers in Ontario, will you now live up to your commitment and restore democracy in Ontario by calling a referendum and letting the people of Ontario vote on this budget you are so proud of?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I really appreciate the question and the member's commitment to democracy, but I guess what we are wondering on this side of the House is, where was that commitment when it came to introducing budgets inside the Legislature? If I was to begin quoting from editorials from Ontario newspapers that were critical of the former government's introduction of a budget outside the sanctity of this Legislature, I wouldn't have enough time during the course of this question period.

We are proud to have introduced our budget in this Legislature, accompanied by a piece of legislation which will ensure that never again in the future can a government hide from the people of Ontario the true state of public finances.

Mr Baird: Premier, let's look at what you've done. You are breaking the taxpayer protection pledge, and worse still—and I look at the schoolchildren in the audience—the Premier is breaking his word to the people of Ontario.

I would like to quote from a Lorrie Goldstein column, where he enumerated the promises that you made. Promise number 162 was, "We will require public hearings on all legislation." I want to ask the Premier directly, what objection do you have to sending this budget that you're so proud of on full public hearings around the province so that taxpayers and working

families can have the opportunity to comment and render a verdict on you, your broken promises, your tax increases, your cuts to health care and the war on the middle class?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to remind the member opposite again of the vote that he cast on June 27, 2002, at which time the government of the day was breaking the Taxpayer Protection Act. It says specifically—and this is a copy of the Hansard document—that Mr Baird voted in favour of that particular breaking of that particular law. So we are not about to be lectured by our good friend opposite when it comes to these matters.

Mr Baird: I did vote to delay a tax cut for eight months. It was wrong, and taxpayers in Ontario have rendered their verdict. They have elected you and they expect you to keep your promises. We have no referendum protection, we have no taxpayer protection, and now we learn that you want to ram this piece of legislation through the House with no input from working families in Ontario. Will you now admit that the only way the people of Ontario will have of rendering a verdict on your tax increases, your broken promises, your cuts to health care, is to vote against your co-conspirator in this fiscal crime, Paul Martin, and the McGuinty-Martin Liberal team right across the province; that in Ottawa South the only way they can send you a message to wake you up is to vote against David McGuinty, the man who says he's so proud of your budget? Will you do that, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member should be careful. I've got many more brothers than does he. I have every confidence in my brother Dave. He is working as hard as he can. I know that.

Let me just tell you something: With respect to the opportunities that we are affording the members of this Legislature and indeed the public, we engaged in an unprecedented public consultation exercise before the budget. We listened and we heard. And we are—

Interjection.

The Speaker: The member from Oxford, I'm going to warn you. The next time I hear an outburst, I will be naming you.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The members opposite have difficulty with this concept, but we are in fact charged with leadership. We've consulted Ontarians. We have listened to them at greater length than has any previous government. We got their very best advice. We have taken into account all of our circumstances, including the $5.6-billion deficit. As a result, we introduced our budget. We are proud of that budget and the investments we are making on behalf of Ontarians in their health care and education.

1440

BUDGET SECURITY

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): It's good to hear that the Premier has brothers. At least he'll have a few votes come October 4, 2007.

I have a question for the Premier. He has acknowledged publicly that he provided advance information on the contents of the provincial budget to his Liberal ally, Paul Martin. Could you advise us under what exception to budget secrecy rules and parliamentary conventions you provided this highly sensitive information to your political friend?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): There have got to be, in the mind of the member opposite, enemies just around that corner. There's no doubt about that whatsoever; we are surrounded.

There is a practice that I was recently informed of, which was carried on by the previous government. It turns out that our officials had been in touch with federal officials during the course of the preparation of the budget because the federal government, in fact, collects taxes. That is a practice that has been in place for a long, long time, where representatives of the government of the day communicate with the federal government in order to give them a heads-up with respect to the provisions that we are introducing, broadly speaking, so that they can begin to make preparations. This is part of usual practice.

Mr Runciman: It's anything but usual practice; it was a political favour, and that's the short and long of it. There were obviously no exceptions that the Premier operated under. Rules don't apply to the McGuinty Liberals. Rules don't mean anything. Promises don't mean anything.

Premier, what does your oath of office mean? I'm going to ask you that. Eight months ago, you placed your hand on the Bible and swore not to disclose secrets outside of the executive council. Will you agree that your decision to whisper in the ear of your Liberal friend is a clear violation of the oath you swore on the Bible?

Hon Mr McGuinty: No, I don't agree.

Mr Runciman: We have to wonder what the oath means in the future if there are no consequences to a Premier of the province placing his hand on the Bible and swearing with respect to cabinet secrecy that he will not reveal cabinet secrets. The Premier has the audacity to stand in this place and say there are no consequences and, in fact, the oath of office is meaningless. What are the questions for the future with respect to this oath? What if a future member of his executive council violates this oath? Are you saying that the oath of office is meaningless, placing your hand on the Bible as a Premier of the province is meaningless? Is that what you are telling the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: No, I'm not saying that.

TAXATION

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Premier. There is a great unhappiness in this province, almost bordering on a state of taxpayer rebellion. There's fury among those who make $30,000 a year and see their provincial taxes going up by some 24% while those who make $200,000 are seeing their taxes

going up by only 3%. There is a fury because the Bank of Nova Scotia this year has just recorded a $786-million profit in its first quarter and you are giving them a capital gains tax gift.

You had an option to tax the wealthy banks, the wealthy insurance companies to pay their fair share, and you chose to stick it to middle-class Ontario. My question is, why?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to remind the member opposite that when he had the opportunity to vote in favour of a corporate tax rollback, he refused to do so.

I think it would be of interest to all members, and the member in particular, to note that in 1992 and 1993 the NDP raised income taxes on working people. A single person making $20,000 a year saw their income taxes increase by $160 under NDP budgets. Under our premium, those working people earning $20,000 will pay nothing more. Under our budget, $20,000 taxable income, you pay nothing; under their budget, $160. That is the difference.

Mr Prue: It is a wonder to watch the rewriting of history that takes place every day from the Premier's lips, especially when you know full well that that omnibus bill contained nine separate bills. And then you wonder why any opposition would vote because we couldn't possibly agree with all nine bills?

With the greatest of respect, the people in this province are furious. They are furious that they have to pay 16% more in provincial sales tax while those who earn $200,000 only have to pay 3% more. The Bank of Montreal has just recorded $602 million in profits in the first quarter. Again, I ask you: Why do you side with the banks and insurance companies and against the working people of this province?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, we reversed corporate taxes for the banks. The member opposite refused to join us in that. And again, as a result of their budgets, they increased income taxes on a single person earning $20,000 by $160. But more than that, when it comes to working families, the NDP increased tuition fees for college and university students by over 50%. That hike would have cost a college student $369 a year and a university student $812 a year. So, again, if you were earning $20,000 under the NDP, you were paying $160 more in taxes; if you were a college student your tuition fees went up by $369; and if you were a university student they went up by $812.

Mr Prue: The people of this province are not wanting your revisionist history, they are wanting you to take action. They are furious at the unfairness of this budget, not what happened 10 or 12 years ago—this budget. They are furious that a working couple now has to pay $1,200 more a year while the CIBC, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, has just reported $511 million in profit in the first quarter and you are giving them another tax break. That's what they want to know about. Why did you side with the rich and powerful? Why are you against working families in Ontario today—not 10 years ago; today?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Just to finish the story with respect to the impact of the NDP budget, in addition to raising taxes on people earning $20,000 a year and raising tuition fees, under the NDP, hydro rates increased by over 40%. They raised gas taxes by over 30% and then they cut the pay of the working people with their unilateral, undemocratic social contract. Contrast that with what we have done for working people. By providing free immunizations, we're saving families $600 per child. Our two-year tuition freeze will benefit all of our students. And with our proposed changes to the Tenant Protection Act, a family in a two-bedroom apartment in Toronto will save up to $250. When it comes to defending the interests of Ontario's working families, we are on the job.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I can just see, 10 years from today in this Legislature, the same kind of thing being said about Dalton McGuinty. They're going to say the same thing: "You didn't take action when you had a chance to do it."

Premier, my question again to you: People in this province are furious that at $26,000 a year they are going to have a 1.2% increase on their taxable income. They are furious that someone who makes $150,000 is only going to be asked to contribute 0.5% at the same time. They are furious that auto insurance companies this very week reported that there is a 500% increase in their profits—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Government House Leader, the next time you do it I'm going to have to name you.

Mr Prue: They are furious that the auto insurance companies have reported a 500% increase in their profits. They are going to get a further tax gift from your government, while the workers pay more. This is the most important decision you have had to make in the young life of this government, and you have chosen to side with the big insurance companies and the big banks against working families. Why did you choose them and not ordinary working people?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr Speaker, the Minister of Finance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Let's just get some independent authority on this question of taxation. I'm quoting from Thomas Walkom, writing in Rae Days. He says on page 206, "Moreover, to many NDP supporters in the middle-class range, Floyd Laughren's tax hikes, the largest in Ontario's history, overwhelmed any notion of fairness."

Putting that within context, my friend's analysis completely distorts—

Interjections.

1450

The Speaker: The member from Durham, I'm going to warn you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend's reference and his party's so-called ad campaign completely distort the Ontario health care premium. I want to remind him that individuals with incomes of $20,000 or under pay absolutely nothing. This is the first health care premium in the country's history that is geared to income.

Beyond that, what we've heard from Ontarians is that "the improvements that we want to our health care system, to our education system, to support our communities" is the real essence of the budget, and he doesn't have the courage or the authority to acknowledge that.

Mr Prue: One only has to look at your own budget document to know exactly what you're doing. It's right there, how you're sticking it to ordinary people. You had the option to increase the capital tax and you chose to follow the Conservatives to eliminate it. You chose that, and you chose to stick it to ordinary working people to the tune of some $1 billion because of your action. Why did you side again with the rich and powerful, over ordinary citizens who are asked to pay more and more, while the banks and insurance companies make more and more?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Ah, the great old NDP. They always have only one enemy. Let me make it clear that 37% of families in Ontario will pay absolutely nothing under the Ontario health premium. He talks about insurance companies, and I'm very proud of the fact that in the first seven and a half months of our time in government we have been able to reduce auto insurance premiums. After eight years of hikes, we've been able to reduce them by 10%.

Finally, I want to tell him that in our budget over the course of the next four years, there is not one single tax benefit for banks in this country. I want to tell him that it was he and his party who voted against the tax increases on large corporations that we brought to this Parliament last fall. They didn't have the courage to vote for it.

Mr Prue: If there was anyone who did not have courage, with respect, sir, it was you who lumped all of those nine bills together, knowing full well that we would be forced to vote against them, knowing full well that in an omnibus bill you couldn't possibly command the respect of the House on that issue.

You just don't get it. You don't get it that insurance companies are raking in a 500% increase in profit. You don't get it that the banks are making $3.1 billion in the last quarter in this country. You don't get it that middle-income, taxed Canadians are paying through the nose in hydro rates that are going up, in insurance premiums that are going up, in property taxes that are going up, in bank service charges that are going up. All you see is what you want to do, and it's wrong.

Now we're seeing double-digit increases for personal income taxes in Ontario. This is the most important decision you have to make. You have chosen again and again to side with the insurance companies and the big banks, and the question is simple: Why? Why are you doing this?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I guess my friend has absolutely no ability to listen to the answer I just gave. It was the bill last fall, Bill 2. You were the speaker. It was an omnibus bill. Besides rolling back the Tory corporate tax cuts, it also had the courage to cancel the private school tax credit, and you voted against that; to end seniors' tax credits, property tax credits for the very rich, and you voted against that. We brought in a bill to freeze insurance premiums while we took steps to roll them back, and you voted against that. We know what you're against. The fact is that in this province we can't figure out for the life of us what that party stands for any more.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is for the Premier. Premier, on May 10 I asked you a question in the House on behalf of all cancer patients in our province. It had to do with zoledronic acid injection treatments for prostate cancer sufferers in our province. You indicated at the time that you would undertake to get an answer to me. That was almost four weeks ago. You also undertook a promise in this House to Ontarians, and I quote directly, "It is not our intention to compromise cancer care for Ontarians."

On Tuesday of this week, I gave the Premier a copy of the document from Cancer Care Ontario confirming that your government had delisted this treatment in our province and that thousands of sufferers of cancer are denied this drug treatment. Will the Premier honour his promise in the House today and indicate that he will reinstate and not delist the zoledronic acid injection treatments for cancer sufferers in our province?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Health.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): On the issue that the honourable member raises, I believe I've also had the chance to correspond with him on that. Yesterday, Terry Sullivan from Cancer Care Ontario was in my office for meetings. We're working closely with Cancer Care Ontario to resolve issues around the increases in their budget to make appropriate opportunity for them to purchase all the necessary drugs related to cancer care.

I would say, this is part of our strategy overall. In this government budget this year, we enhanced by between $250 million and $300 million overall the amount of money that we are making available to Ontarians to purchase the necessary medications to keep them well and help them regain their health in the instance of the onset of illness.

On this issue, I'm very confident that we're going to be able to resolve it to the satisfaction not only of Cancer Care Ontario but of course of the patients who are in need. I'd be pleased to keep the honourable member informed as progress is made toward that.

Mr Jackson: Terry Sullivan reported to Cancer Care Ontario back in January that your government had put a hard cap on the drug plan. They were using $60.7 million just for the drug funding program. They indicated to the government in a letter that it was going to be $68 million. Your government failed to even talk to Cancer Care Ontario through this period, as reported by Dr Sullivan.

Mr Premier, we spend more in this province on Tylenol 3s in the Ontario drug benefit plan than it will take to reinstate this drug. Now that Novartis is setting up today private clinics in this province in order to transfer private insurance benefit plans, which are the only access point to get this drug treatment and have it administered in hospitals and clinics in our province, I ask you again: Please simply state for the record that you will honour the promise and give Cancer Care Ontario the funding they require as health professionals to ensure the safety and long-term hope for cancer patients in our province.

Hon Mr Smitherman: First, at the outset, you use Terry Sullivan to suggest that there are no conversations between my ministry and Cancer Care Ontario. I'll work with Terry—

Mr Jackson: I have his presentation.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I didn't heckle you. I'll work with Terry Sullivan to correct that record. I've met with Terry Sullivan this week. I've seen him twice and I've seen Alan Hudson as well, and that's a repetition, frankly, of the pattern on a weekly basis around here.

But on the substance of the matter—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm with them almost every single day. But on the key point that the member raises, I go back to what I said in answer to the first question: We're working on a daily basis with Cancer Care Ontario to resolve this in a fashion which is satisfactory both to them and the government of the day.

I repeat what I said earlier. This is part of our commitment to enhance access for the people of Ontario to the drugs they need. An investment of between $250 million and $300 million for that purpose is contained within the budget that was presented here on May 18. I believe progress is being made on this, and I'll get back to the honourable member and report to him on progress, as I indicated in my earlier answer.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Premier, I want to talk to you again today about drug delisting. Your budget still paves the way for massive delisting of prescription drugs that people depend on for their day-to-day lives. On Tuesday, when I asked you about this, you said, "Trust us."

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): "Trust us"?

Ms Churley: Yes, he said, "Trust us."

You said then that the section of the budget bill that gives the Minister of Health the right to delist drugs without going to cabinet had nothing to do with delisting drugs. But the Minister of Health later admitted to the Globe and Mail that he hadn't read the bill in detail.

Premier, I have read the bill in detail. I'm going to ask you again today, when are you going to amend your budget bill so people won't be afraid of having their drug coverage wiped out at the stroke of the minister's pen?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Refer to the Minister of Health.

1500

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): On this matter, shortly after it was raised in the Legislature, I had the opportunity to speak to the media, and I know the honourable member was there because she heckled me in the middle of my scrum. But the fact of the matter is that the people—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Smitherman: It worked well for him, too.

The facts remain clear, and the facts are that the clear intent of the section at hand that the member raises is to provide for the government of Ontario the fast-tracking of generic products once they're approved by the federal government. That is the intent of the section.

On the issue at hand that the member raises about further powers, the key point is this: The Ontario Drug Benefit Act provides the necessary powers with respect to delisting. Those are the only ones that would ever be required.

I would say our government's commitment stands in sharp contrast to the government she was a member of. Let me read a quote from the Toronto Star in 1991: "The government predicts"—this is the NDP government—"that it will save $35 million next year and $100 million in 1992-93 by implementing tighter controls on which drugs are covered under the ODB plan ... and which payments are reimbursed." Their actions as a government stand in stark contrast to ours. Ours are backed up with an additional one quarter of a billion dollars in additional funding this year—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

Ms Churley: Well, Minister, revision of history: It was the NDP that started the Trillium drug plan. He missed that part of history.

Look, the people of Ontario don't trust the Liberals any more. Your intent is not good enough. I want to say to you that section 20 of the Ontario Drug Benefit Act now says the cabinet must approve the delisting of drugs, but your bill clearly amends it to allow you, the minister alone, to do it all on your own. I can tell you, Minister, these changes in law do not happen by accident. They are put in bills deliberately by government for a reason. In this case, given what we've already seen you do, we know what this is all about.

The Speaker: Question.

Ms Churley: You want to make it easier to delist drugs, but you want to do it as quietly as possible. Minister, I ask you, do you think people are that stupid? They know what you're up to. Do you think they will really believe—

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon George Smitherman: I really did feel at that last part she was baiting me a bit, but I won't rise to it.

I want to say to the honourable member, just a couple of points: I've said very clearly that the powers required around delisting are there in the ODB. But let me just ask you this: You were in cabinet. At the point that a drug is delisted, it's well known to be delisted. There's nothing quiet about it. At the point a delisting occurs, everybody knows. But the point of the matter is clear: The intent of the section is to get the generic product fast-tracked for the benefit of the people of Ontario, and any powers—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Smitherman: On the issue of believability—

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): This is not about getting a drug on; it's about getting a drug off.

The Speaker: The member from Nickel Belt, order. The member from Nickel Belt, I'm going to warn you. You may finish off, Minister.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm always intrigued when that member, of all members, stands up on the point of believability and heckles other people. That's very clever.

I want to say, in response to the concern that the honourable member from Toronto-Danforth raises, that the legislative intent is clear: It is to provide the opportunity for the faster listing of generic products, to the benefit of the taxpayers of the province. No additional powers with respect to delisting are required. We'll take a good, hard look, as we move this bill forward, at making any changes that make that abundantly clear.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): My question today is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. I would like to ask you about the automotive sector. Today we're reading reports that the federal Conservatives do not believe Ontario's automotive industry is competitive. They don't believe that industry is worth investing in. Minister, I know you don't share that view. I know the Premier doesn't share that view. I don't share that view and the people of Oakville don't share that view. What are you doing to ensure that Ontario's automotive industry remains at the forefront? How are you ensuring we remain a world leader in this industry?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I thank the member for the question. It's obvious that the federal Conservatives don't understand Ontario's economy and don't care about the auto sector in this province.

I remind members, who all know very well that the auto sector is a vital part of our economy and accounts for 20% of our manufacturing base—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Member for Nepean-Carleton, I'm going to warn you.

Hon Mr Cordiano: The auto sector accounts for 20% of our manufacturing base, 45% of our exports and 350,000 jobs, but the industry is facing unprecedented competition. That is why we moved to announce the Ontario automotive investment strategy: $500 million to help the industry. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the federal Conservatives would turn their back on Ontario and ignore the auto sector.

Mr Flynn: Yesterday afternoon, Mr Stephen Harper—that Stephen Harper—unveiled his corporate policy at the Toronto Board of Trade. Based on his comments, it was clear that he does not understand Ontario. Ontario's prosperity and economic well-being are based on our people and on the investments we make in our people. He thumbed his nose at this government's plan to attract over $5 billion in automotive investment to Ontario. Minister, why is Mr Harper refusing to acknowledge how important the auto sector is to Ontario?

Hon Mr Cordiano: I'm very concerned about the comments made by Mr Harper, and his policies and the detrimental effects they're going to have on Ontario if they don't support the auto sector. But I'm not alone. Buzz Hargrove said, "I think it's bad news for the industry. It sends a total wrong message to the industry. It would set the industry back 10 to 15 years."

The federal Conservatives are prepared to turn their back on Ontario and for us to lose those jobs to the United States. Well, we're not prepared to impose, like Mr Harper wants to, the same failed policies of Mike Harris that saw 19 plants located in North America but not one of those plants came to Ontario. We're not prepared to abandon the auto sector. I suggest to the federal Conservatives, and to the provincial Conservatives across the way, that they talk to Mr Harper and get him to support the auto sector in Ontario.

POLICE OFFICERS

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I was going to address my question to the Premier, but he hasn't been answering any of my questions lately.

I'm really pleased that you brought up Stephen Harper, because my question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Mr Harper actually does have a community safety platform, unlike our other—what's his name, Paul Martin? He hasn't got anything. Stephen Harper will get rid of the ineffective gun registry.

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: You're talking about Stephen Harper; let's talk about Paul Martin.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Could you now put your question in 15 seconds?

Mr Dunlop: This question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. On budget day, it was bad enough not to even hear the word "police" mentioned in the budget speech—

The Speaker: You've run out of time. If you choose not to do a lecture and a speech and then ask a question, you may be able to get through it.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I'm having some problems, because I didn't get a question. But I'll give you an answer, even though you didn't ask a question. I'll try to pick one out of four or five.

Why don't we talk about the budget? If you take a look at the issue, you'll see that the justice sector got $75 million more than your government provided. You should also know that there are fewer front-line officers in Ontario now than when you were in government, as a result of your fiscal policy. For you to stand up and try to say that Stephen Harper has a particular policy on crime—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. You've also run out your time.

1510

Mr Dunlop: My question is very simple. This government promised 1,000 new police officers in their election platform, and I didn't see the word "police" mentioned once in the budget. I'm asking the minister, when will we see one police officer mentioned in the budget? This government, when we were in power, put 1,000 new police officers on the streets of the province of Ontario; 1,000 more police officers. I want to know very simply when the minister—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. The member from Don Valley East, I'm going to warn you. Next time I'll name you.

Mr Dunlop: I wanted to get back to Stephen Harper, but I want to know when we will see new police officers implemented across the province by this government—a simple question.

Hon Mr Kwinter: I would have hoped he would have got back to Stephen Harper because I could have talked to him about it. The fact of the matter is that when you left this province as a government, there were fewer police officers on the street than there were in 1995, when you came here.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Premier. Premier, your delisting of physiotherapy is not only bad for patients, it's not going to save you any money either. Dr. Edward English, who is the chief of orthopedics and rehabilitation medicine at Scarborough Hospital says, and I'm quoting, "Patients who have had amputations or joint replacement surgery need more than three weeks of outpatient physio to get them back functioning in the community. Those who can't afford to pay will lose all the benefits of that surgery. Hospitals may be forced to keep them as in-patients longer than the three to five days they spend now."

Premier, you're going to spend more to keep patients in the hospital because they can't get physiotherapy in the community, and you're not going to benefit them when they really need high-quality health care. Will you admit today that your decision to delist these services is wrong, and will you continue to fund these essential health care services under OHIP?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): To the minister.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm pleased to tell the member and all members of a few important facts with respect to our plan to re-profile physiotherapy services in our province. The first is that there is no impact whatsoever in the 2004-05 fiscal year, which means we have the opportunity to work with the physiotherapy community to make sure we're delivering these services in the most equitable way possible. We believe, therefore, that it's essential that we enhance the physiotherapy capacities in our long-term-care settings, that we provide more resources to home care so that, as an example, treatment services can be extended for longer, if that's what the dictate is, and that we make available, for people who are particularly vulnerable, access to these services.

The sad reality is that physiotherapy services have been available unequally across Ontario. By using tools like the community care access centre, which has a common assessment tool, we ensure that the people who are most in need of these services are the ones who actually get them. I'm pleased to say that we have the opportunity for the course of this fiscal year—

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Ms Martel: It's true there has been uneven access. By cutting it off OHIP altogether, I cannot see how that makes the situation any better. You know full well that most people who get home care do not qualify to get physiotherapy services, so it's wrong to tell this House that people who are discharged from hospital are suddenly going to get physiotherapy services. That isn't happening now.

Bill Gleberzon, who is the co-director of advocacy for CARP, said his members are really concerned, that, "Many don't have private insurance and even those that do are finding that their coverage is being cut back. The government is entrenching a two-tier system." He is right. Access to eye care, access to physiotherapy, access to chiropractic services in Ontario are not a luxury and should not depend on whether or not you can afford to pay for these services. Minister, you're not going to save any money and you're not going to ensure that people get access to health care when they need it. Admit you were wrong and announce today that you will continue to provide OHIP coverage for these important health care services.

Hon Mr Smitherman: As I clearly said in the Legislature yesterday, difficult choices were involved in being able to support the priorities that we believe are important. On the point of physiotherapy, where she started, the reason I use the phrase "re-profile" is because it's our clear intent to take a significant portion of the resources currently available for physiotherapy and transfer those to enhance care in long-term-care settings, and transfer

more of those resources to enhance the quality of physiotherapy services that are provided in home care.

I remind the member that I think it's incredibly important that we recognize that the common assessment tools used in community care access centres are the way we can ensure that those people who are most in need are the beneficiaries of the services that our province is able to provide. I'm proud, notwithstanding the difficulty of these choices, that we were able to make significant enhancements in five areas of community service, all of which will have the implication of providing care where people need it and diverting their need to receive that kind of care in the hospital setting.

NURSES

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): My question is for the Minister of Health. Your reference today in your statement, which you announced at the Toronto East General Hospital, was that our government will be investing $50 million to provide opportunities for new nursing graduates. For the nurses who are graduating this year, this is great news. Can you tell this House more about how this will help new nursing graduates in the province?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think there is a point on which we all agree: We have had a shameful situation in our province for too long whereby too many of our nursing grads had to seek employment in other jurisdictions. With today's $50-million announcement we make three significant moves forward: First, we provide $30 million to provide 1,000 opportunities for nursing grads to get their first experience in a hospital or long-term-care setting; second, because injured nurses and senior nurses still have so much capacity, so much value, so much institutional memory and passion, we want to use them in the role of helping to train and mentor these young new grads, and we'll be dedicating resources to make that possible; and third, because it's incredibly important that all of the clinical training be of the highest possible calibre, Ontario is making an unprecedented $10-million investment in the clinical simulation equipment that will give nurses very real patient-like experience while they're in school, making sure that when they graduate from school, they're ready to serve Ontario.

Mr McNeely: Minister, your initiative has already gained widespread praise from groups such as the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. The $50 million in new funding, as I understand it, will not only benefit new nursing graduates but also nurses recovering from injuries. Can you tell us more about the program for injured nurses?

Hon Mr Smitherman: The community has received this well. I'd like to read a quote from Joan Lesmond, who is the president of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario: "The Liberal Party's election platform gave nurses renewed hope with its explicit promise to hire 8,000 new nurses and bring the proportion of RNs working full-time to 70%." They go on to say further: "And today's announcement is another positive signal that government is committed to meeting these two targets."

One of the things that has surprised me and shocked me, frankly, is the high proportion of Ontario nurses who are on long-term disability. What this initiative is about is bringing them back into the service of the people of Ontario, using their minds, their experience and their passion to help to mentor and transfer that kind of experience to our new grads.

I think it's incredibly important that we have a philosophy in our government and in our health care system that says, with respect to nurses, "We need them all. All hands on deck with respect to nurses." Today's initiative gives opportunity back to those nurses whose backs may be a little bit weak but who have all the presence of mind to help them mentor and assist our new grads.

HEALTH SERVICES
SERVICES DE SANTÉ

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Like most members of the Legislature, I've been hearing from my constituents about your government's budget and the impact it's going to have on them and their families. Although people are concerned with many aspects of the budget, the biggest issue I'm hearing about, and the most vocally, is the decision to delist health care services. This decision will have a direct impact on the residents of my riding, and they have been very clear about their lack of support for this measure. I will ask the minister: Will you please reconsider your decision to delist chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): By now I know the member has had a chance to hear, on a few cases, that we recognize the difficulty of this decision, and, frankly, the response is understandable and predictable. But the fact of the matter remains that as a government we face the challenge of adequately funding medically necessary services, and that's what we've done in our budget.

In a statement earlier in the House, this member was very keen to acknowledge, as an example, that her community desires to have community health centres. I'm proud to say that as a result of the prioritization in this budget, there is $111 million for new primary care initiatives, including $14 million targeted specifically at community health centres.

1520

That is but one of five very specific and distinct examples of the kind of move forward that we're able to make, bringing more care down to the community level. Our family health team proposal provides the opportunity for health care providers to come together and offer an array of services that meet the needs of those popula-

tions. That means that if those populations dictate that optometry, physiotherapy or chiropractic are their priorities, they'll be able to work those into their family health teams.

Ms Scott: I appreciate the member's commitment to community health and to increasing the full-time nurses, but I'm asking a question. This is an increased tax. Ordinary people in my riding are going to have to cope with additional fees, and not just the taxes you're increasing under the health care premiums, but also paying for chiropractors.

I've been in a profession—

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Laurie, that's just not true.

Ms Scott: It is true. I've been in a profession, in nursing, which is very strenuous and rigorous—it's called a nurse's back. I'm just telling you about having professions.

I have the luxury of having a job that has benefits. Many people in my riding don't have that luxury. They're self-employed business people and farmers. They work in strenuous jobs and they need chiropractic services. They don't have those benefit plans. You've already tried to find ways of increasing hydro rates, the cost of health care premiums, and water regulations in the Nutrient Management Act. Would you please reconsider the delisting of chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services?

Hon Mr Smitherman: In her question, the honourable member speaks quite a lot about chiropractic. I think it's important to say that the maximum benefit that the OHIP system has been able to provide for chiropractic is but a subsidy for those people who require those services: a maximum of $150 a year. We look at the aggregate impact of $150 a year and we come up with $100 million.

The result is clear that, faced with other priorities which are desperate for resources—including primary care; home care, which we all acknowledge is under pressure; long-term care, around which until a few months ago, people were more prone to use the word "crisis"; with respect to the lack of quality and capacity in our public health system; and, seriously, about the lack of funding over time for community mental health and addictions—we are faced with difficult priorities.

We made choices and we stand by those choices, not because we're proud that we had to make them, but we're proud that we've made the right choices. We're building a health care system that will be to the benefit of the people of Ontario and that will ensure sustainability of medicare for future generations. That's the challenge we face—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. New question.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Ma question est au premier ministre. Demain à Kapuskasing, je vais avoir l'opportunité de rencontrer les oculistes, les physiothérapeutes et les chiropraticiens de Hearst et de Kapuskasing, qui sont très en colère, avec leurs patients, que votre gouvernement ait retiré du formulaire médical l'habilité de payer ces spécialistes. Monsieur le premier ministre, la question est très simple : qu'est-ce qu'on dit demain à ces gens-là faisant affaire avec vos actions? Êtes-vous préparé à renverser la décision?

L'hon. Dalton McGuinty (premier ministre, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales): Au ministre de la Santé.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I apologize to the member that I'm unable to answer his question in the language it was asked in. I'm a slow learner on that point.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Smitherman: Marilyn, I gave you a chance to be magnanimous; I knew you couldn't do it.

I want to say, in response to the very serious question by the honourable member, I think I've had a chance by now to outline the position that our government takes. We recognize that these are difficult choices. On the issue of physiotherapy, let me be very, very clear. There is no impact on physiotherapy in the 2004-05 fiscal year, meaning that until March 31, 2005, there will be no change or implication about the way we fund physiotherapy in our province. Hospitals will continue to provide those services where they're currently doing so. We'll be working to re-profile that money in a fashion that assures the most equitable distribution possible of those precious resources.

What does that mean? If you're in a long-term-care facility, your access to physiotherapy is going to be enhanced. If you're receiving supports for home care, we're going to make additional resources available to expand our physiotherapy capacities in home care. For anyone who has a need for physiotherapy, for a medically necessary service related, as an example, to a disability or an illness, we're going to continue to be able to offer support for those people.

What you see is an attempt to make a difficult decision, but making sure that we offer prioritization to those most vulnerable in our society. I'm proud of the efforts that we've made.

M. Bisson: Monsieur le ministre, je ne comprends pas comment votre ministre de la Santé peut être fier d'une décision qui, franchement, n'est pas supportée par les spécialistes et non supportée par la population. La réalité est que la plupart du monde, les gens à Kapuskasing, à Hearst et à travers la province, qui ont besoin de ces services ne sont pas dans des institutions dont vous parlez. C'est du monde qui demeure dans la communauté et qui n'ont pas d'autre choix. S'ils ne sont pas capables de rentrer voir leur spécialiste, payé à travers le système de santé, ils n'auront pas d'option.

Donc, je vous demande très clairement : on se rencontre avec ces gens demain. Ils sont en colère. Ils viennent nous dire avec colère que le problème va être que beaucoup de monde à Kapuskasing, à Hearst et à travers la province va être sans services une fois que cette décision sera mise en place. Je vous demande encore, êtes-vous préparé à renverser votre décision, oui ou non?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I think the honourable member makes points about the challenges we face around health care delivery in remote areas of our province, and especially in northern Ontario. But the fact remains that these services will be enhanced in the areas we've mentioned. I think the member asked at the beginning of his question, in the face of this concern expressed by people, how could we continue with the decision? Frankly speaking, because we're charged with difficult decisions, and this is one of those difficult decisions. The fact of the matter remains that on a priority basis, we've determined that investments in primary care reform to give people access to a doctor in the first place, our additional supports for public health to provide immunization and make sure we're able to deal with any infectious disease outbreak, our capacity to enhance home care overall—and I could go on—dictated that we had to make some priorities and make difficult choices. While I recognize that concern is expressed related to those, I think the trade-offs we had to make were the appropriate ones.

COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): My question is to the Minister of Education. As you know, school boards across the province provide space in their institutions for non-school or community programs for thousands of people through permit programs and city parks and recreation programs. The boards have had to increase their fees for these permits over the past few years because of lack of funding from the previous provincial government, and many organizations can no longer afford the increases and fees that stand in the way of their programs. A good example is what's happening with the Toronto District School Board, which is taking money, $2.3 million of their own, to provide for the students in Parkdale, Thorncliffe Park, Malvern, Jamestown and Jane-Finch. We know that providing space for young people and keeping them off the streets reduces crime in our neighbourhoods. What is our government going to do to open up these spaces without prohibitive user fees for our students?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I want to thank the member both for her question and for her previous work and continuing work on behalf of students in developing in a complete sense what we're promising to do as a government, which is their physical as well as their intellectual and emotional needs.

Thanks to the Minister of Finance and the Premier, there is money allocated in this budget to bring about, again, community use of schools that was taken away from students and communities around this province. These fully paid-for public facilities should be open to the public, and the honourable member is very right in her advocacy to see that happen. I want to say there are other ministries I will be collaborating with—Tourism and Recreation and others—to make sure we do this in a way that brings about not just access to the schools but real recreation and other enriched activities for students and other members of the community after school.

Mrs Cansfield: It's refreshing to know that our government is committed to providing not only young people but also adults with the programs they need. We know about and talk around lifelong learning, which is really critical for all of us. It's imperative that we also encourage our schools and our community groups to continue to use those facilities. Will you continue to work with the school boards and the communities to allow the groups to use the gyms, pools and classrooms, and then will you monitor such activities to determine if these efforts should be made permanent, particularly in schools at risk?

Hon Mr Kennedy: There's another dimension there, which is the role we have in ensuring safety in our communities. There has been an absence of taking responsibility, frankly, to fight for our kids. How are we going to make sure that kids are part of our communities unless we show them we care what their future is—the choices they make? There are choices being offered to them every day, on the streets and in different places, to do different things. To have the kinds of values their parents want for them, there needs to be a role played by communities and schools. We will make sure, not just for the community use of schools but also with specific programs working with boards, that there are alternatives, that youth and others have places to turn and programs to occupy them that will develop their potential rather than deny and frustrate them and head them in other directions.

1530

TOBACCO GROWERS

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: As agriculture minister you have said, "I'm 100% behind the implementation of a province-wide smoking ban. It's the right thing to do." But back in December you told a meeting of close to 2,000 people in Ontario's tobacco community that you were in their corner, that you would fight for them and for their compensation.

What has changed since then? You're not the health minister. The right thing to do now is to hand over the money. When will you do that? When will the $50 million that your leader promised during the election arrive in tobacco country?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I represent a tobacco-producing riding. But I'm also a member of a cabinet that realizes the terrible harm that tobacco does to lives in this province and the cost to our health care system. I stand behind this government's pledge to put in place a province-wide smoking ban. We need to do that, as responsible government.

At the same time, we do recognize that there are economic impacts on the tobacco-growing communities. As we move forward in developing a holistic and comprehensive Ontario tobacco strategy, one of those

components that we will be looking at is, how do we work with helping those farmers transition and work with those tobacco-growing communities?

Mr Barrett: We recognize that a smoke-free Ontario will ultimately hurt Ontario's tobacco farmers. They don't understand. Why have you abandoned Ontario's hard-working tobacco families?

Hon Mr Peters: The goal of a province-wide smoking ban isn't to hurt anyone. The goal of the province-wide smoking ban is to ensure that we look after the health of our citizens in this province. That's what we need to do.

But at the same time, we do recognize that there is an economic impact on those tobacco-growing communities. As I said earlier, as we move forward in developing that comprehensive and holistic Ontario tobacco strategy, we need to look at that impact and how we transition that tobacco-growing community into another crop.

We're going to work with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Finance—all those ministries that are involved. We're going to work toward ensuring that we have that comprehensive strategy in place, and we're going to see that that happens.

FINANCEMENT DE L'ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Ma question est au ministre de l'Éducation. Comme vous le savez, il y a deux ans, M. Rozanski dans son rapport avait fait des recommandations pour trouver une solution à l'iniquité qui existe présentement entre les conseils francophones et les conseils anglophones. Vous savez vous-même qu'une fois que vous êtes devenu ministre, vous avez appointé un comité spécial pour regarder cette question. C'était unanime, même avec le staff du ministère qui était là, qu'on avait besoin d'un investissement d'environ 120 $ millions pour être capable de rétablir l'iniquité entre les conseils anglophones et francophones. Dans votre budget, vous avez seulement mis en place 30 $ millions. Quand est-ce qu'on peut s'attendre à ce que les autres 90 $ millions soient mis en place?

L'hon. Gerard Kennedy (ministre de l'Éducation): Merci pour la question du député. C'est une question intéressante. À cause des résultats du budget provincial, il y a une augmentation, pour les élèves francophones, la plus haute dans l'histoire de la province. C'est vrai, absolument. Regardez encore; c'est une augmentation d'environ 10 % pour chaque élève francophone dans la province.

Aujourd'hui on a un gouvernement qui est un partenaire avec les conseils scolaires, avec les parents et avec les élèves pour trouver une solution au problème de l'assimilation. C'est le premier gouvernement qui accepte cette responsabilité. C'est très important. Pour la première fois, il y a 30 $ millions pour aider les élèves francophones avec leurs résultats scolaires, et c'est une très bonne nouvelle pour les élèves francophones.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. That's the end of oral questions.

Interjection.

The Speaker: You know you have to make the proper paperwork and submit it to the table.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the taxpayer protection law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11, 2003, not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised in TV ads not to raise taxes by one penny on working families; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty pledged in writing to obey the taxpayer protection law, which requires a referendum before increasing taxes;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all of the McGuinty government's tax increases are put before the people of Ontario in a referendum."

That's signed by 25 constituents of my riding, Lanark-Carleton, and the riding of Leeds-Grenville, and I have signed it.

BENEFIT AND PENSION INDEXATION

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I am pleased to present petitions on behalf of the Hamilton and District Injured Workers Group, members of which are in our gallery today, and I acknowledge them and thank them for coming today.

"Whereas in 1985, all three political parties in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario agreed to enact full indexation (cost-of-living protection) in the Workers' Compensation Act; and

"Whereas the Canada pension plan is fully indexed annually; and

"Whereas in 1995, Bill 165 restricted indexation (cost-of-living protection) drastically of most benefits and pensions;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We, the residents and taxpayers of Ontario, in support of all injured and disabled workers, spouses and their children, demand restoration of full indexation (cost-of-living protection) for all benefits and pensions retroactive."

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): As well:

"Whereas the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board adds Canada pension plan disability benefits to an injured worker's deemed earnings to determine the loss of earnings or future earnings lost; and

"Whereas deducting Canada pension plan disability benefits from loss of earnings or future earnings lost benefits systematically under-compensates injured workers; and

"Whereas the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board bases long-term compensation on deemed earnings that an injured worker is not actually receiving;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act by removing the deeming provisions and providing legislation to base a loss-of-earnings benefit to reflect actual lost earnings;

"To amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to end the deduction of Canada pension plan disability benefits from future economic loss and loss of earnings benefits retroactively."

There are some 2,600 signatures here, and I affix my signature to both petitions.

TILLSONBURG DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have here a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that has now exceeded 6,000 signatures.

"Whereas the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital has asked for ministerial consent to make capital changes to its facility to accommodate the placement of a satellite dialysis unit; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has already given approval for the unit and committed operational dollars to it; and

"Whereas the community has already raised the funds for the equipment needed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care give his final approval of the capital request change from the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital immediately, so those who are in need of these life-sustaining dialysis services can receive them locally, thereby enjoying a better quality of life without further delay."

I affix my signature to it as I totally agree with the petition.

LCBO OUTLET

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the town of Limoges wants to offer facilities to promote tourism and that this service would have a positive impact on the economic development locally and in the surrounding areas;

"Whereas the town of Limoges greets hundreds of tourists at a camping ground in Limoges;

"Whereas the closest LCBO and Beer Store point of sale is located in Embrun, more than 10 kilometres away;

"We, the undersigned, request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario approve the liquor licence (wine and beer) at the Pronto convenience store located at 550 Limoges Road in Limoges."

1540

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I've been working with the trailer industry coalition, as well as the Ministry of Finance people, and today I presented to Mr Mike Colle, the PA to finance, a petition as well as a communication from the Ministry of Finance in support of a solution to this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp (MPAC) and are subject to property taxes; and

"Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourist economy without requiring significant municipal services; and

"Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003; and that the tax not be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with the owners of the trailers and trailer parks," trailer manufacturers, "municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders."

I'm pleased to sign this and endorse it, one of the thousands of petitions I'm receiving from across Ontario.

AJAX-PICKERING HOSPITAL

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I'm adding some 2,000 names today to the petition I'm presenting, to bring it to well over 4,500.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas at the time the Centenary Health Centre and Ajax-Pickering hospitals amalgamated under the umbrella of the Rouge Valley Health System, a commitment was made by the Health Services Restructuring Commission that the communities of Whitby-Pickering-Ajax, according to the amalgamation agreement, would not lose a full-service hospital and would maintain all existing services; and

"Whereas municipal governments in the region of Durham have provided financial support to the Rouge

Valley Health System on the understanding that Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service hospital; and

"Whereas numerous service clubs and other organizations have also raised money in support of the expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital and services provided therein such as the maternity unit on the understanding that the Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service facility; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health System has changed its strategic plan without consulting its key stakeholders, such as the residents who use the hospital, the doctors, nurses and other professional staff that work within the system and the local governments and organizations that fund the hospital; and

"Whereas this has led to a decrease in the level of service provided by the maternity unit and the number of acute care beds;

"We, the undersigned concerned citizens of west Durham, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That a full-service hospital with all the existing services at the time of amalgamation be maintained at the Ajax-Pickering site and new services added as the population continues to grow and age, as agreed to by the Ajax-Pickering General Hospital and Centenary Health Centre in the amalgamation agreement signed May 31, 1998."

SEWAGE SLUDGE

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the residents of Wasaga Beach, wish to bring forth our concerns regarding the transfer of approximately 5,700 tonnes of 14-year-old sludge, which contains metals, from the North Simcoe transfer station to our recently closed landfill site. To date, there are no EBR requirements for hauled sewage.

"Due to this and the geography of the Wasaga Beach site being so close to the longest freshwater beach in the world and other sensitive areas, there exists a threat to the environment and the public's health. This questionable product should be moved to a desolate location. Once damaged, the environment and people cannot be replaced;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the sludge from being transferred to Wasaga Beach."

I've signed this petition, but I will also note that the petition seems to have been effective. The county of Simcoe now seems to want to send the sludge to the Nottawasaga landfill site.

WATER QUALITY

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have more petitions on water regulations. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas comprehensive, rigorous measures listed in regulation 170/03 and the Nutrient Management Act are essential in protecting the safety and quality of Ontario's drinking water;

"Whereas Bill 170/03 legislates clean drinking water for both rural and urban areas, regardless of cost;

"Whereas, under current provincial municipal funding arrangements, municipalities are being forced to take funds from other essential required services to implement these vigorous measures;

"Whereas the capital upgrades, operational, maintenance and lifecycle expenses are cost-prohibitive to property owners, resulting in the closure of campgrounds and mobile home parks;

"Whereas, demonstrated by the experiences of other jurisdictions, designating water-taking fees to fund water source protection is an effective way to help ensure the safety and quality of municipal water supplies;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario urge the Minister of Finance to designate a significant portion of the proposed fees to be collected from water-taking activities as financial assistance for municipalities and property owners to aid them in complying with provincial water quality regulations."

I have affixed my signature because I support this petition.

PRIMARY CARE

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Peterborough is suffering a crisis in terms of accessibility to health care, brought on by a severe and growing shortage of family physicians; and

"Whereas the community of Peterborough has demonstrated extraordinarily strong local leadership in developing a proposal for primary care reform which is very innovative and will provide access to primary care for the growing list of more than 20,000 residents in our community without a family physician; and

"Whereas this proposal has been endorsed by the county of Peterborough, the city of Peterborough, the Peterborough County Medical Society, the Peterborough Community Care Access Centre, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre and the Peterborough County-City Health Unit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work with representatives of the local community to ensure that all residents of Peterborough have access to an appropriate primary care provider through the timely implementation of the proposed integrated primary care model, as this model provides appropriate and equitable compensation for family physicians while incorporating sufficient interdisciplinary health care providers, community linkages and appropriate administrative, infra-

structure and information technology supports to enable health professionals to enjoy a more realistic, healthy work-life balance."

I'll fix my signature to it.

FISH HATCHERY PROGRAM

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads,

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources' provincial fish hatchery program annually stocks over 10 million fish into over 1,200 water bodies within the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas provincial fish hatcheries contain unique genetic strains of indigenous fish species; and

"Whereas recreational fishing is a multi-billion-dollar industry and a huge contributor to tourism and the economy throughout the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the world-class Great Lakes salmon fishery, as well as many local fisheries, are dependent on the Ministry of Natural Resources' fish stocking program;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources to refrain from any cutbacks or cancellations to this provincially significant program."

I sign my name in support.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This petition is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the so-called Tenant Protection Act of the defeated Harris-Eves Tories has allowed landlords to increase rents well above the rate of inflation for new and old tenants alike;

"Whereas the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal created by this act regularly awards major and permanent additional rent increases to landlords to pay for required one-time improvements and temporary increases in utility costs;

"Whereas the same act has given landlords wide-ranging powers to evict tenants;

"Whereas before last October's elections Premier McGuinty promised real protection for tenants at all times; and

"Whereas our own MPP called for a rent reduction;

"We, the undersigned residents of Doversquare ... petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately scrap all Tory guideline and above-guideline increases for 2004, as an elementary gesture of goodwill toward tenants, who voted massively against the Tories in last October's election.

"To shut down the notoriously pro-landlord Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal.

"To abrogate the Tory 'Tenant Protection Act' and to draw up new landlord-tenant legislation in consultation with tenants and housing rights campaigners."

I will provide this information to you, Mr Speaker.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas over 1.2 million people use chiropractic services every year in the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas those who use chiropractic services consider this an important part of their health care and rely on these services along with the OHIP funding in order to function; and

"Whereas the elimination or reduction of chiropractic services would be viewed as breaking the promise not to reduce universal access to health care; and

"Whereas by eliminating or reducing OHIP coverage of chiropractic services, where the patient pays part of the cost, will end up costing the government far more in additional physician, emergency department and hospital visits;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Parliament of Ontario does not delist chiropractic services from the Ontario health insurance plan, and that assurance is given that funding for chiropractic services not be reduced or eliminated."

I affix my signature, and there are many signatures involved.

1550

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to give the House notice of the business for next week.

On Monday, June 7, in the afternoon, we'll be dealing with the budget motion; in the evening, with Bill 83.

On Tuesday, June 8, in the afternoon, we will have an opposition day.

On Wednesday, June 9, in the afternoon, to be confirmed.

On Thursday, June 10, also to be confirmed.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Can you read it again? I missed something.

Hon Mr Caplan: Speaker, do you want me to read it again? OK, I'll do it again.

On Monday afternoon, the budget motion. On Monday evening, Bill 83.

On Tuesday afternoon, an opposition day.

The House business for the rest of the week is to be confirmed.

Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to call the order for third reading of Bill 8, notwithstanding standing order 77(b).

Mr Bisson: Further to that point of order, we also have unanimous consent to divide the time equally.

Hon Mr Caplan: I have that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): You've heard. Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF MEDICARE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L'ENGAGEMENT D'ASSURER L'AVENIR DE L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ

Mr Caplan, on behalf of Mr Smitherman, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act / Projet de loi 8, Loi créant le Conseil ontarien de la qualité des services de santé, édictant une nouvelle loi relative à l'accessibilité aux services de santé et abrogeant la Loi sur l'accessibilité aux services de santé, prévoyant l'imputabilité du secteur des services de santé et modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Speaker, before I begin my remarks, I believe we have unanimous consent to divide the time equally among the three parties.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Is there consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Caplan: I'm very pleased to be sharing my time today with the members from Don Valley West, Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, Mississauga West and Oakville.

The Deputy Speaker: There is rotation.

Hon Mr Caplan: Oh, OK. Bad directions.

The Deputy Speaker: You just have to speak and then sit down.

Hon Mr Caplan: Very good. In that case, Speaker, those are the speakers who will be speaking for the government caucus, and I must tell you—

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just want to indicate to the deputy government House leader that I can't believe the government House leader's office gave any bad direction. I think it was badly executed.

The Deputy Speaker: That's not a point of order, but we'll take that as it's given.

Hon Mr Caplan: Speaker, I concur with the member. That's absolutely clear.

I will be supporting and voting in favour of Bill 8, the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act. I encourage all members of the House to support it. It is an excellent and outstanding piece of legislation which will improve accessibility to health care in the province.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I am somewhat surprised that Bill 8 is coming to us in this fashion. I would say that from my constituents' perspective on this, it's somewhat of a draconian piece of legislation. When you put it alongside the recent tax increase on health, it concerns me; further, alongside the privatization of health care, the delisting of services, that also raises serious concerns for my constituents.

In the case of Bill 8, which really is the strong arm of the Ministry of Health, George Smitherman reaching out into the hospitals, putting his hands around the necks of the chairs of the volunteer boards of hospitals—is stifling the hospitals, in my view.

I know that there isn't enough accountability at the Ministry of Health. I say that because when I look at Lakeridge Health in my riding or I look at Ross Memorial in Ms Scott's riding—and in Peterborough; we just met with them—they're very concerned about their operating budgets. They know full well that the money that has just been allocated in this very budget isn't enough to provide resources for the doctors under the OHIP agreement or the nurses' settlement, which is a provincially negotiated wage settlement. There isn't enough money in the hospital budgets.

This centralizing of power at the Ministry of Health—George Smitherman is going to sign the cheques and he's going to hold the money out from those hospitals. What really happens here with Bill 8 is that I see the emergency rooms in my hospitals, and the people in emergency situations in mental health, with not enough money because of George Smitherman. What Bill 8 does is centralize the decision-making and all the power in the Premier's office—Premier Dalton McGuinty, the person who levied a tax on health. It was never mentioned during the budget. Now he's going raise a tax on health.

Furthermore, he delisted three critical services that are primary access points to health care. Those three critical services have been mentioned in every question period ever since this budget came down: optometry, chiropractic and physiotherapy. From my short time as the assistant to the Minister of Health, when we were in government, I know the pressures in health care. I know the pressures in drugs and access to proper drug treatment. There are cost pressures. Costs are inflated in the order of 10% each year. I know the costs in the OHIP fees. Doctors, because there's so few of them, need to have the resources to do their job. They don't want to be capped. They want full access. They want to be paid for their time, as well they should.

Then, on top of that, we have the nursing situation today. I know my seatmate here, Ms Scott from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, as a nurse, spoke very passionately today about the importance of having the right people with the right resources at the front line of health care: the nurses of Ontario. I know she speaks glowingly of Doris Grinspun, who's the RNAO executive director. I believe she has a PhD in nursing. In my view, she's telling the Minister of Health that there's no access to health care.

What Bill 8 really does is give all the power back to the Minister of Health. I'm looking for some direction here in terms of our strategy on Bill 8. I am going to listen carefully. I don't believe the opposition is going to support Bill 8. I know Elizabeth Witmer, as our critic and a former health minister, has tried relentlessly to move some amendments. In fact, she's so committed to health—respectfully, she's not here, but her passion is in health. I think some of the members in the Liberal caucus actually supported a couple of Elizabeth Witmer's amendments.

I think they were whipped into action. Ms Wynne would know that, by mistake, some of the renegade backbench Liberals—and I credit them; I wish I could name them here—actually voted for a couple of amendments. I'm sure the Liberal whip got to them. Those persons are now penalized. Those Liberal members who supported even the slightest nuance of amendment will never see the light of day. I'm telling you, they'll never be in cabinet in a hundred years. The strong arm of Dave Levac, the party whip for the Liberals, will come down on them. They will be silenced. So these many sheepish backbenchers will be whipped into shape.

They know in their hearts that they're trying to ram Bill 8 through. Here it is, a Thursday afternoon, late in the day. There's a structural change in the standing orders—because I read this stuff. It's my understanding that we're supposed to be debating Bill 86. I'm surprised that Bill 8 is before us, in this format, on a Thursday afternoon.

I believe that if Elizabeth Witmer, our critic, was here, there would be very specific details brought to your attention on Bill 8, a very voluminous bill, full of regulations, controls and centralization of health care. I am shocked, amazed and somewhat disappointed. There's something afoot here.

I don't want to give up the time because somebody else will get it. Isn't that the way it goes?

1600

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): No, we're in rotation.

Mr O'Toole: We go to rotation. In that case, I'm going to stop here, but I put clearly on the record that I find this somewhat offensive, on a Thursday, on the most draconian bill of this new Liberal government, layered on top of a health tax, layered on the slippery slope of the privatization of health, the delisting of services, not to mention the potential for delisting of drugs, as was mentioned today by Cam Jackson, the member for Burlington. He questioned the Premier on access to the appropriate treatment for cancer people, and he wouldn't commit the dollars to save lives. I'm disappointed. This bill is one more piece of the strong arm of a majority government, put in charge by the whip, trying to ram this bill through.

I'm one who won't be supporting Bill 8.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I'm happy to rise to speak to this bill. I've been to almost all the committee hearings and have watched this bill go through the process. I want to do a few things in my remarks today. I want to establish the purpose of this bill, because I think it's important for us to understand what this bill is about. There's a lot of rhetoric around, and I want to establish what the purpose of the bill is. I want to talk about it as a new approach to dealing with accountability in health care. Then I want to talk about what some of the issues of contention were as we went through the process of the committee hearings. Finally, I want to make the link between this bill and our budget, because I think there is a direct link to be made between what we're trying to do in this bill and what we've done in our budget.

First of all, as the title of the bill says, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act: Those are critical terms—accountability, accessibility and the health quality council.

This legislation establishes the Ontario Health Quality Council to report on the performance of the health care system in this province, and it outlines the responsibilities of that health quality council to report annually to the minister, and then the minister to report to the Legislature on what the health quality council has observed. What it will be reporting on are the standards and benchmarks that have been set the previous year and how the health system is doing in reaching those benchmarks.

This legislation reinforces commitment to the Canada Health Act, and I think there is nobody in the province who would disagree that that is a good thing.

Finally, what the bill does is establish a mechanism for the establishment of accountability agreements between the government and health resource providers: hospitals, homes for the aged, as they're defined in the bill, independent health facilities and community care access centres. This is in fact a pivotal piece of legislation in our plan to deliver higher-quality health care in Ontario.

Because it's a new approach, and this is the second piece of what I want to talk about, there has been a lot of opposition. In the hearings we heard from people from around the province who are worried, who are concerned. They want to know where we're going with this bill. The fact that there has been a lot of opposition doesn't mean we're on the wrong track, but it also doesn't necessarily mean that everything we're doing is perfect. So, of course, there have been a lot of amendments to this bill. I'm not one of those people who thinks that just because the throngs are angry, we must be on the right track. What we did was take this bill out after first reading to the province and say, "What do you think? Help us modify it." And that's exactly what has happened over the previous months. We've consulted, we've listened and we've made many changes to this bill.

I want to reference a couple of quotes that indicate how significant this legislation is. One of the people who came to talk to us was Colleen Flood, who's a law professor at the University of Toronto. Her preference would be for us to move in a direction of devolution and regionalization, but she says:

"In the absence of devolution and regionalization, then Bill 8 in its provisions for performance agreements is a second-best alternative. The clearer and more open the lines of responsibility and accountability, the less is the risk that stakeholder interests will prevail over more diffuse public interests....

"Transparency is key. I think there's ample transparency provided for in Bill 8, much more than the equivalent legislative provisions in other jurisdictions, where the many checks and balances of due process do not have to be gone through before a Minister of Health can fire a CEO, for example....

"We can placate with money, but the status quo will not change and real reform will not occur. Ontario now has the opportunity to convert its rhetoric about renewal into action through Bill 8. Let's seize it."

I think Ms Flood has identified exactly what it is we're trying to do. We are trying to make a fundamental change in the way we deliver health care in this province. We are trying to make a fundamental change in the way we talk to Ontario citizens about health care, and how they can talk back to us. That's one of the fundamental points of this legislation.

I'm also going to quote from something that was said by the member for Nickel Belt in this Legislature. I want to qualify what I'm going to say here with the statement that I know very well that the member for Nickel Belt does not support this legislation. However, when she was talking on May 12 in the long-term-care debate, in reaction to the report that was brought by my colleague from Nipissing, she said, "If the minister is going to put this money into facilities"—speaking of long-term-care facilities—"the minister had better be sure about where that money is going. He'd better make the rules really clear about how the money can be spent to hire new personnel. Otherwise, it's just not going to happen."

I think that, inadvertently, the member for Nickel Belt has made a fundamental case in support of this piece of legislation. We have for many years in this province thrown money into health care and budgets have been expanding exponentially, particularly under the previous regime. We have got to get our health-care spending under control. If we don't, then we are not going to be able to do anything in this province except fund health care. We will not be able to do all the other things that government is expected to do. So that's what this bill is attempting to do, to change the dialogue about health care and change the accountability mechanisms. I think, for that reason, it is a fundamental change.

There have been issues of contention, obviously. I want to go through a couple of them and talk about what we have done in this last round of amendments to try to deal with some of the problems people have had with this bill.

One of the issues that came up over and over again was the issue of the negotiation of the accountability agreements between the ministry, between the government and the health-care provider. The debate pivoted on whether this should be a pure negotiation and nothing but a negotiation, or whether it should be an imposition of an accountability agreement. The argument was that there should not be any point at which the minister would have the right to impose an agreement on a health care provider.

Our point is that we have provided for negotiation. In this last round, we introduced an amendment where the amount of time has been expanded from 60 to 90 days in the first negotiation between the minister and the health resource provider. So 90 days for the first time, and for the second time, where the first accountability agreement was a term of one year or less, and after that, 60 days. Originally, we had only allowed for 60 days of negotiation.

What we're saying is, we acknowledge that, in the first round, there may be some issues that will take longer to resolve, so we've introduced that amendment and it was accepted by the committee. But we have retained the right for the minister to impose an accountability agreement when all else has failed.

1610

The suggestion from some of the people who came to speak to us was that there should be a commissioner or somebody else—a third party—who would impose that agreement or arbitrate the agreement between the ministry and the health resource provider. Our position is that the minister is responsible. It's the minister who is going to be held responsible; it's the government that is going to be held responsible. So it is our responsibility, if necessary but not necessarily, to impose that accountability agreement.

We've extended the period of time. We've made it very clear that it's the board that's going to be negotiating with the minister. It's not the CEO of the health resource provider; it's the board that's going to be negotiating and, in that way, local concerns will be on the table, because that was another concern that was raised. The boards are going to have the responsibility to do that negotiation. I think we've gone as far as we could on that.

On the issue of accessibility, I want to reference the comments by the member for Durham. He talked about the committee not being whipped and a mistake being made in terms of accepting an amendment. I just want to be clear that what happened was, the government was introducing an amendment that would have allowed, in subsection 20(2), under the discussion of "public interest": "The minister and the Lieutenant Governor in Council may exercise any authority under this part" in considering what "public interest" is. We were amending this piece to add "accessibility." There's a list—transparency, quality improvement, fiscal responsibility,

value for money, public reporting, consistency, trust, reliance on evidence, focus on outcomes and any other prescribed matter—and we added "accessibility."

The opposition brought in an amendment to add "timely access." The argument I was making in the committee was that "accessibility" was a broader term, that accessibility could include different kinds of accessibility, that timely access was one piece of that but there may be other kinds of accessibility. What happened was, the committee decided to accept both amendments. So "timely access" and "accessibility" have been added to subsection 20(2). I think what that demonstrates is not that the Liberal caucus wasn't whipped but that in fact the committee process worked in that moment, and I think it's been a very good process.

Another issue that was contentious in the course of the discussions was opted-out physicians. I was interested that in some of the hearings some of the younger members didn't know what opted-out physicians are. Being the daughter of an opted-out physician, I can tell you that an opted-out physician is somebody who deals directly with the patient and bills the patient directly, and then the patient is reimbursed by OHIP. There are not very many opted-out physicians left in the province. Originally when this bill was drafted, we suggested that there be no more opted-out physicians, including the people who are currently opted out—currently, the number of opted-out physicians is somewhere between 40 and 70. Those people came to us and said, "Could you at least grandparent the physicians who are currently opted out?" That's exactly what we have done. We have put a provision in the bill that would allow those who have worked in this way throughout their careers to continue to do that, but from here on we will not be having opted-out physicians. They won't be allowed in the province, because we want everybody to be dealing directly with OHIP.

Those were the contentious issues. We have dealt with them in what I think is a very responsible way. What this bill does is allow us to move on the initiatives we want to deliver as part of our mandate. We want to fund home care in this province. We want to move health care into the community. We want to be able to respond to local need and cut down wait times. We want to be able to have more full-time nurses, as the Minister of Health referenced today. And in order to do that, we have to get our health spending under control. That's what Bill 8 does. Bill 8 moves us towards that, and I am absolutely convinced that it's a move in the right direction and that we will look back at this bill as an historic and pivotal moment in the delivery of health care in this province. I am happy to support it.

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased to join the debate on third reading of Bill 8 today. I'm not under the impression that we're pushing it through now. I do believe there has been a fair amount of debate on this particular piece of legislation, and certainly the committee meetings made some recommendations. We've obviously got some concerns about it, and it's fair to say our party won't be supporting this. But the fact of the matter is, it has received substantial debate, and we're ready for the passage, as far as we're concerned.

During the provincial election, the now-Liberal government committed to pass a commitment to medicare act that would make universal, public medicare the law in Ontario. This is basically what it says: "Under our plan, two-tier medicare will be illegal in Ontario." The commitment was made again at the time of the introduction of Bill 8. However, the government cannot say Bill 8 will eliminate two-tier health care, and it says nothing about how it's going to address the key pressure that are fuelling the drive for two-tier health care, and that, of course, is waiting lists.

Now, with the introduction of the Liberal government's first budget, this government is promoting a two-tier health system by introducing a health premium and delisting services such as optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic services. It's safe to say there is outrage over the delisting and outrage over the health premium, and I think it's fair to say to everyone in this House, if they've been in their ridings or listened to any of the media, that this is one of the things that's dragging down your government today, and I believe it has become a boat anchor around the neck of Paul Martin as well.

But further, the government committed in the election to ensure that Ontarians had access to health care services. Bill 8 and the recent budget do just the opposite of that. We on this side of the House cannot support a bill that shifts such an immense power to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, and this is exactly what Bill 8 does, as far as our party is concerned. There seems to be a desire of the Liberal government to shift power into the hands of the government, particularly to the minister's office.

I've heard a lot about this in my riding, and I think my colleagues have. Our critic for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Elizabeth Witmer, has heard so much because she has so many friends and former colleagues who are health care stakeholders, and of course they are in constant contact with her. It is very special to have on our side of the House, although it's only eight months, two people, Jim Wilson and Elizabeth Witmer, who are former ministers of health. They have a lot to offer in, I guess, a total of about six years, as ministers of health in our province.

We see this pattern in Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures, as well, as it gives the minister the power to list and delist drugs as he sees appropriate. Now, there's quite a debate going on here. I'm going to be interested to hear the member from Nickel Belt's comments, because I know she's an advocate of this and feels very strongly that the minister has too much power and that we'll probably see a lot more, not only drugs, but other services, delisted in the future because of this bill and because of Bill 83.

1620

Since clause-by-clause, we've heard from various health care organizations that still have serious concerns

about this bill. One of the significant outstanding concerns for hospitals across the province and for the Ontario Hospital Association is the lack of dispute resolution in the bill. I have three hospitals in my riding. We have a large hospital just to the south of us: the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie. I can tell you that these three hospitals, Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital, Penetanguishene general hospital and Huronia District Hospital, all have huge concerns about this as well. I meet every month—in fact, I'm meeting tomorrow morning with the North Simcoe Hospital Alliance, which is a combination of the two boards, and this topic will of course come up.

They're not only concerned about this dispute resolution; they're also concerned about the fact that the budget allocates an average of 3.4% over four years. I know there's a movement in the House that says they're going to find efficiencies in the system and use forms of measurement to look at the services that are provided by each individual hospital. But the fact of the matter is, they have been receiving an average of 7.5% to 8% over the last seven or eight years, and I'm not so sure they can survive without cutting services in a serious manner with this piece of legislation and the amount of funding that has been allocated to the hospitals.

Unfortunately, amendments to provide for a dispute resolution mechanism under section 21 were voted down. I know that Minister Witmer tried to put that through—or the former Minister Witmer tried to put that through. It's very difficult not to refer to her as the minister because she has been such an outstanding person in her career in cabinet. These specific amendments add accountability to ensure that the power to impose an agreement can only be made by the order in council, or, alternatively, that it be subject to ministerial approval. They addressed one of the most contentious, outstanding issues remaining within the legislation, the imposition of accountability agreements. The legislation still allows accountability agreements to be imposed without referral to a third party dispute resolution mechanism. As a result, the government will have the power to impose anything it likes on any individual hospital, while ignoring the people who know the most about the hospital and the services it provides to the community.

A third party dispute resolution mechanism would have provided for true third party review in a manner that is streamlined to ensure expedient resolution of the matter. In addition, it would have provided the parties with independent service and given the sector needed information respecting how dispute over the agreements are actually being addressed. The commissioners would have the authority to deny or review if they felt it wasn't in the public interest to do so. Further, this will have ensured an open, democratic process of negotiation that would have resulted in a fair resolution that would ultimately be more conducive to achieving the goals and objectives set out in the accountability agreements.

Despite the fact this government committed—and I'll read what the commitment was. This is from the speech from the throne, November 20, 2003:

"Your new government has made a commitment to bring an open, honest, and transparent approach to government.

"It is keeping that commitment....

"It will open up government and its agencies, bring the voices of Ontarians to Queen's Park, and make the entire public sector more transparent and responsible to Ontarians, because transparency and accountability are the best safeguards of public services."

Again, that's from the famous speech from the throne on November 20, 2003.

No one agrees against accountability. All the presenters who appeared before the committee on Bill 8 support accountability. According to the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, and I'll quote from them as well, "That accountability is a one-way street, from provider organizations to government, with no accountability envisioned from government to providers and the public."

I'd like to read from McMillan Binch's health law bulletin entitled "Moving from Accountability to Government Control in Health Care." I've got quite a bit to read, and I'd like to put it on the record on behalf of the critic, Elizabeth Witmer, who could not be here today. A few points I'd like to put into the record:

"The recently released 2004 Ontario budget reports that the Ontario government has concluded its assessment and has determined that it is appropriate to include hospitals in the government reporting entity. In the government's view, the only question that remains to be determined is how, and to what extent, this consolidation will take place.

"The 2004 budget suggests that the Ontario government would prefer a more limited form of consolidation. In their view, this would allow the government to exercise 'high-level control' while still recognizing that hospitals and similar organizations operate with a greater degree of autonomy than directly controlled organizations. Despite their expressed preference for a limited form of consolidation, the Ontario government did not take the position that full consolidation would not take place, and instead merely stated that they would work with the PSAB and the Office of the Provincial Auditor to resolve their concerns."

It goes on to say, "The results of these consultations could be influenced by the enactment of Bill 18 and of Bill 8, the Commitment to the Future Of Medicare Act"—of course, what we're discussing today—"which requires accountability agreements to be signed between hospitals and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Bill 8, which passed second reading on April 14, 2004, has attracted a greater share of attention than has Bill 18, but both bills contain expanded powers that suggest the potential for the Ontario government to exercise greater control over the management, administration and governance of hospitals.

"The April 15, 2000, report prepared for the Ontario Hospital Association entitled 'From Accountability to Control' notes that the potential for the Ontario govern-

ment to exercise control pursuant to the powers set out in Bill 18 or Bill 8 could significantly alter the way in which the CICA criteria for reporting entities applies to hospitals.

"The OHA report states that the likely result of the amendments would be the consolidation of the accounts of Ontario hospitals into those of the province of Ontario"—and that's what a lot of hospitals are very afraid of. "The OHA report lists the following concerns that were raised with respect to the consolidation of accounts:

"Confusion between the respective responsibilities and accountabilities of government and hospitals; reduced effectiveness of public sector institutions; diminished governance and effectiveness; and diminished volunteerism and citizen agreement.

"The extent to which hospital books are to be part of the province's financial statements will likely determine the level of control that will be exercised by the Ontario government over hospitals in the future. Indeed, if hospitals are placed on the books of the government, it is likely that the Legislature will look to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for direct accountability for all hospital activities, leading to even greater control and micromanagement."

Before I get into community governments in the McMillan Binch report, I'd like to talk a little bit about the volunteers and the diminished possibility of volunteerism. I'm really concerned about that, and I don't know how many people in this House work closely with their hospital boards, but I can tell you that volunteerism is a huge part of the functions of the hospitals in the province of Ontario, particularly in areas such as fundraising, where we have hospital foundations and they work to raise funds.

You have the hospitals that have the hospice organizations, and of course the auxiliaries in the hospitals are a huge part of the services that are provided to the clients, to the patients of the hospital. Without the volunteers, without the auxiliary, I don't know how most of the hospitals in Ontario could perform. I believe that's fairly consistent with what happens across our province, that we have so many volunteers who work so hard, put so much time in, raising money, helping out with patients, with clients.

1630

I'm really afraid. This is what I'm hearing from my colleagues and this is what I'm hearing in my riding, from my hospital boards, from members of the boards and from the administration of the hospitals: that there could be a serious lack of volunteerism in the future. It's not included as part of the $28.1 billion or whatever it is we spend each year in the province on health care. It's absolutely phenomenal when you think of it. If you added in all those volunteer hours, my guess is it would actually amount to a couple of billion dollars a year, if you took every aspect of the health care volunteering that occurs in our hospitals and our health care stakeholders organizations.

I would like to go on and read into Hansard more on community governance. Again, it's part of the McMillan Binch report:

"Hospitals are closely tied to the communities they serve. Community volunteers serve on hospital boards and ensure that hospital policies address the concerns of their local communities. The extent to which the Auditor General's value-for-money audits will interfere in the direct relationship between hospitals and their communities remains to be seen. The potential for the micromanagement of Ontario hospitals by government raises the concern of a loss of local accountability. Ontario hospitals are heavily reliant on local volunteers, both for their service with respect to hospital boards and in relation to community fundraising."

I think that's an echo of what I've just said on the amount of volunteer work, the time that members of our community spend in helping out their hospitals.

I don't know what it is about a hospital in a small community, but it's almost like the focal point of the community. For a lot of communities it's the arena, in some places it's the hockey rink or the community centre, but wherever a community has a hospital, it tends to be the focal point. I know it's difficult to sustain small hospitals across our province. I know it's difficult in a lot of cases to attract doctors to those communities. But I can tell you that I've been so impressed, since being elected as an MPP in 1999, to work with my hospital boards.

They're all volunteers. Some people operate businesses, some are retired and some are former patients of the hospital, people who have been very sick. They want to give something back after their experience in the hospital, so they go back and work as a volunteer on the board, on the auxiliary, on the foundation. It's amazing to watch these people and see the interest they have in the communities.

I know that early Monday morning—I'm going to put a little blurb in here for the Huronia District Hospital in Penetanguishene and Midland. They have one combined board that basically operates the two hospitals. They're having what they call their annual Golf Odyssey. They raise about $50,000 in a morning of golf. You have to get there very early. You get as many holes in as you can. You get sponsors. Each year I'm asked to go. I usually manage to get there for two and a half or three hours before I have to come back to Queen's Park. It's a wonderful fundraising opportunity next week. Golf is very popular in our part of province, as you can probably understand. We have, like I think it is in every part of province right now—

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I'm going to invite you to my tournament.

Mr Dunlop: OK. The Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital has the Hawk Ridge classic. Each year, they take a specific project in the community, whether it's the cardiac ward or the pediatric ward. They have about 288 golfers go out and they raise between $75,000 and $100,000 each and every year, all by volunteers.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Wonderful tournaments.

Mr Dunlop: Yes. The Hawk Ridge Hospital Golf Classic is one of the top hospital golf tournaments in the province. Of course, it's probably held in the best riding in the province; that adds to it as well.

My point here, as we go back to Bill 8 and the volunteerism—I think other people will probably refer to this as well—is, it's so important that we continue to acknowledge the work of our volunteers and how they contribute. With the people in that Golf Odyssey, organizing that event in Midland-Penetanguishene, or the Hawk Ridge golf classic, there's probably $150,000 a year that goes into special projects in those two communities, Midland-Penetanguishene and the district of Orillia, that we wouldn't have.

Each year they provide well-funded money. They are good projects. Usually we have a lot of the doctors and medical staff of the particular area the project is destined for. They tend to be at the classic. They raise money as well and they thank the volunteers for it. So again I want to stress that.

In McMillan Binch, they also refer to the section called "Hospital Achievements in Accountability." This goes back to Bill 8, and I'll quote again:

"Ontario hospitals have played a leadership role in establishing a framework for accountability, including the development and implementation of the following measures:

"Through the Ontario Hospital Association, they created the first hospital data collection organization to monitor hospital activity;

"They have acted as leaders in the development of the formula for hospital funding;

"They publish reports and operating plans that are available to the public; and

"They produce annual hospital report cards that provide for comparative assessment of hospital performance. These hospitals report cards are one of the most comprehensive reporting systems in North America." And of course our government helped to implement that report card system.

"In addition, the Ontario Hospital Association has prepared an April 2004 policy framework, Advancing Accountability Through Hospital Funding Reform, that presents a new funding approach directed toward the promotion of accountability. In the policy framework, Ontario Hospital Association advocates an approach that considers the unique attributes of hospitals, and bases its funding on patient care needs.

"The paper includes a statement by Senator Michael Kirby"—of course, we know the Kirby report—"chair of the Senate social affairs committee, who indicates that top-down control should be rejected in favour of a system of incentives that would ensure and promote efficiency and effectiveness of health care systems. Senator Kirby goes on to credit the initiatives of the Ontario Hospital Association in encouraging debate and consultation through preparation of the policy framework.

"The inclusion of Ontario hospitals in value-for-money audits should not happen without recognizing the significant steps that have already been taken by hospitals themselves to promote accountability and without establishing safeguards (in legislation or otherwise) that hospitals, as independently governed entities, will not be fully consolidated into the government's books."

That is the concern. The hospitals are concerned that the books will be taken over by the province and that they will lose their independence and their identities as hospitals. I refer back to the point that that will take away from the volunteerism that occurs in our communities and will make them another bureaucratic building run by the government of Ontario. I think that is the wrong direction. That's one of the key reasons I am not in favour of supporting this piece of legislation.

As noted in the piece I have just quoted and as expressed by presenters at the Bill 8 hearings, I'd like to reiterate that this bill threatens voluntary boards and diminishes the role of the chief executive officer of the hospital. Despite hearing from hospitals across the province, this bill will continue to undermine community and volunteerism—back to that again. It would appear that this government is moving from government accountability to government control, and that is the key area we're concerned about here right now.

The Catholic Health Association of Ontario, the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and providers of faith-based care never requested exclusion from Bill 8 or accountability for the expenditures of public dollars. They all support wholeheartedly accountability. What they sought was some comfort that they could continue their faith-based approach to health care within the new era of accountability, and that through Bill 8 the government would honour the commitment of the Premier to recognize the invaluable contribution of faith-based health care providers and the maintenance of their mission and governance.

I urge the Minister of Health to follow up on the recommendation of the standing committee on justice and social policy to direct the staff of the Ministry of Health to enter into immediate discussions with the Catholic Health Association of Ontario to find a way to accommodate the spirit and intent of the defeated amendment to Bill 8 into accountability agreements with faith-based health resource providers.

1640

According to the Ontario Medical Association, "Bill 8 continues to be a significant problem for the physician community." This comes from our critic, Elizabeth Witmer's, office. She has done a lot of work with the OMA. "While this government has brought forward some amendments, the fact is they had to because the bill was so poorly drafted and conceived that in its original form it was unworkable in the real world.

"At a time when Ontario needs to make itself an attractive place to recruit our new medical graduates and retain our already practising physicians, Bill 8 would do the opposite and in fact is one of the most" poor "pieces

of legislation for doctors in quite some time." It does cause them quite a few problems.

Some key outstanding issues for the OMA are:

Section 14—"As written, this bill delivers astonishing powers to the general manager whereby the GM may force people to submit information. These powers are unnecessary, intrusive and threaten privacy. These provisions should be removed." That's according to the OMA.

Section 9—"The radical changes to practice methods for occupational health doctors (doctors working for large companies etc). This means unnecessary added costs to the government and making it more difficult for companies to provide the health care they need." Those are a couple of the points that the OMA had through Elizabeth Witmer's office.

I wanted also to dwell for a couple of moments, in the time I have left, on some letters I've received from my constituents. A lot of people have been extremely concerned about this bill, and that goes for people I have met who are—this is even before Bill 83, the budget act. These are people who are concerned. Many are employees of hospitals, patients, seniors etc.

I'm not going to read the people's names into it, but here's an example of one that came in early in the process. It reads: "I am writing to strongly voice my opposition to Bill 8. If passed, it would give the Liberal government the power to strip job security from hospital collective agreements so that contracting out can go ahead, wages cut, benefits gone and pensions frozen. This would mean loss of jobs, loss of homes and a Third World state in our health care system. This cannot happen. I cannot support my family on minimum wage. Could you? Oppose Bill 8."

Hon Mr Caplan: You're quoting Sid Ryan.

Mr Dunlop: No, that's a young lady who is a mother of two and an employee of a hospital in my riding.

Hon Mr Caplan: It's Sid Ryan.

Mr Dunlop: No, it's not Mr Ryan. Sorry.

Another one from a senior, and I get a lot of those, as you can understand. It says:

"Dear Mr Dunlop:

"We are concerned senior citizens and strenuously oppose Bill 8, legislation that would allow the Minister of Health to open our personal and private health files to an audit. Furthermore, we oppose any legislation that allows further reorganization of the health care system.

"Yours truly"—

I won't read her name, but it's not Sid Ryan's mother.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you very much.

I also wanted to do this. This is from a young lady named Linda, and she's a member of one of the CUPE locals and works as a medical transcriptionist at one of our local hospitals.

"Dear Mr Dunlop:

"I strenuously oppose the proposed Bill 8 legislation that would allow the Minister of Health to strip job security provisions from my collective agreement and roll back my wages and benefits.

"Furthermore, I oppose any legislation that allows further reorganization of the health care system.

"I provide a valuable service to my hospital and community and should not be subjected to this attack on my livelihood.

"Furthermore, if this Bill 8 does pass and our wages rolled back, which child will go to school, spend $30,000 to $60,000 on tuition fees to come out of it with a good education and only make pocket money for a living? Why bother? Who do you think, with our wages rolled back, will go to that Friday night show, or that Thursday night dinner, or purchase that new vehicle or a new home? With all the inflation rates rising, how can anyone make a living on such measly wages? You think our health care system is deteriorating; what makes you think this will improve matters?

"We, as a working force, have worked very hard to be and to become who and what we are, and we should not be attacked in such a manner. We are humans. Let's treat each other like one. I strongly oppose this Bill 8, so please do not allow this to pass, I beg you. We deserve more as a working community. Don't you agree?"

That's signed by this young lady who works at one of these hospitals. That young lady voted Liberal in the last election, but I can tell you she won't vote Liberal in the next election, and there are a lot of those out there.

I think you know that you're going to come back with your spin that it's the best bill in the history of the province and all that sort of thing. But the fact of the matter is—

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: Well, I hope you're not including your budget measures act as your first piece of legislation. I know you're having a difficult time over there. I know the month of May has not been an easy one for you, and I know you want to get out of this House early. You like to be out of here and knocking on doors, helping the people who—

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I doubt it.

Mr Dunlop: Yeah, I don't think they want to knock on doors. I'll rescind that. I guess they don't want to knock on doors, because they'll get them slammed in their faces.

There's no question in my mind that the health care premiums and the delisting of services that I mentioned earlier are having a serious impact on anybody who is a Liberal in Ontario and anybody who is a Liberal in our country today. You can tell that by the polls Mr Martin is experiencing.

You know, aside from Bill 8, I feel sorry for Mr Martin. I know this guy stabbed Jean Chrétien in the back for years and all that sort of thing, but he didn't seem like that bad a person, and as finance minister he tried his best. He wasn't successful, but he did try his best. But there's a real problem. He started out last November, I guess—correct me if I am wrong—at 51% support, and now he's at 27% or 28%. It's unbelievable. No one can

believe that has actually happened to this man. So I do feel sorry that he is actually—

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I respectfully request that our colleague from Simcoe North focus on the provincial level of government and perhaps on Bill 8.

The Deputy Speaker: That's a valid point of order, although the member has been working hard these last 30 or 40 minutes, so—

Mr Dunlop: It's painful at times, I can tell you.

I keep referring to Mr Martin, our Prime Minister, the Honourable Paul Martin, because obviously health care is a two-way street. Canada Health and Social Transfer has his name all over it. He's tried his best. He has tried to balance the books and all the sorts of things that governments do, but it has been unsuccessful. People have not appreciated it. They expected more. They didn't expect the sponsorship scandal, and they didn't expect Dalton McGuinty to come out with a budget with a health care premium. That's what we're hearing at the door. That's what my colleagues who are running federally are hearing at the door, and it's disappointing.

In the meantime, we can't support Bill 8. We won't support it. We know it will pass. We know you will go ahead without our recommendations and implement it anyhow, but the fact of the matter is, it's disappointing. On behalf of our caucus I want to put that on the record.

I look forward to further debate on this, and I thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity of spending the last 37 minutes with you.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Nickel Belt.

Applause.

Ms Martel: Hold the applause; it's going to get worse from here.

New Democrats have been opposed to Bill 8 right from the introduction. We were opposed through two sets of public hearings, and as I stand here and speak on behalf of my party as health critic, it won't be a surprise to anybody, and especially to those committee members who are here today who sat with me, that we remain opposed and will be voting against it once again on third reading.

1650

We are opposed for three reasons, all of which I will elaborate on in the time I have: first, because the bill gives sweeping, draconian powers to the Minister of Health to take over boards of hospitals and community care access centres, to take over independent health facilities etc. We are opposed to the Minister of Health having those sweeping, draconian powers.

Second, we are opposed because the health quality council that is proposed in the bill and that the minister says will somehow hold this government accountable to its health care promises will, regrettably, do nothing of the sort.

Third, we are opposed because the bill does absolutely nothing—nothing—to stop the further privatization of health care in Ontario, privatization that was started by my friends in the Conservative Party when they were the government, and privatization that continues now under the Liberals because they have done absolutely nothing to live up to the election promises they made to stop that privatization and who, in fact, have merrily continued on down the road of the same privatization that was started by the Conservatives before.

So, in the time I have, I'm going to elaborate on all those points.

Let me deal first with the sweeping, draconian powers of the minister. I was here at a time when a previous government brought in such sweeping, draconian powers in the form of Bill 26, which was done not long after the Conservatives were elected, I'd say in the fall of 1996. I could be corrected. But regardless, the government of the day at that time brought in Bill 26, which was an omnibus bill, and made a number of very dramatic and very destructive changes. But one of those changes also incorporated or included the introduction of the Health Services Restructuring Commission, which was given very broad, sweeping powers by the government, essentially to amalgamate hospitals, to close hospitals, all under the guise of a third party but with the full consent of the party in power of the day, that being the Conservatives.

Speaker, you will recall, because you were here, that the Liberals opposed Bill 26. They, with us, opposed Bill 26, and much reference at the time for the opposition involved the broad, sweeping, draconian powers that the former government was giving the Health Services Restructuring Commission to close hospitals, to take over hospitals, to make a number of changes in hospitals etc. I remember. I was here. And here we are. Here we are, Speaker, with a new government that was opposed to a former government bringing in changes that provided broad, sweeping powers to the Health Services Restructuring Commission.

Now we've got a new government that brings in those same sweeping powers and gives them to the Minister of Health to use, to go into hospital boards and to take them over and to get rid of hospital boards and to deal with CEOs and to make the very same negative changes—unilaterally now, by the minister—that the Liberals used to oppose when the Tories brought them in and gave those same kinds of powers to the Health Services Restructuring Commission.

So I find it passing strange that when in opposition, the Liberals were oh, so opposed to broad, sweeping, draconian powers that were given to a Health Services Restructuring Commission to deal with hospitals, and here we are under the Liberals and they've got those same kinds of draconian, sweeping powers now held in the hands of the Minister of Health himself. What a change an election makes.

I've heard the minister and some of his colleagues on the committee repeatedly try to say that the accountability agreements that are an integral part of part III of the bill will be negotiated. When he came to the committee on two separate occasions, the minister used

the word "negotiated." He had another press release on the day we started clause-by-clause of the bill the first time, in March. He talked about how these would be negotiated. He tried to convince everyone that somehow there is going to be some kind of equal power between the parties in the development of these agreements.

Nothing—nothing—can be further from the truth. The provisions of the bill clearly state that the minister and the minister alone has the unilateral power at the end of the day with respect to accountability agreements to impose orders, to impose compliance directives, to have his own way. There is nothing negotiated about that kind of power.

Let's look at some of the provisions. On page 27—this is the old bill, because the new bill hasn't printed yet, and there is not much change in the entire section—it very clearly says that the minister and the party in question, be it a hospital board, a CCAC, for example, "shall negotiate the terms of an accountability agreement and enter into an accountability agreement within the applicable number days provided for in subsection (2.1)."

There is a bit of a change. I'm reading from the amendment that the government put forward, but the references are the same. "Shall" is the terminology that's used throughout this section. I make the point that that is being used to very clearly show that the minister, at the end of the day, has all the power in this regard. The minister and health resource provider "shall negotiate the terms of an accountability agreement and enter into an accountability agreement within the ... days that are provided." I'll return to the number of days. Then it says under the compliance section, and this is 21(2), "A health resource provider ... shall ... comply" with a compliance directive, the emphasis on that because of course the health resource provider has no options in this regard.

In fact, there are some penalties listed in the bill that flow when the health resource provider doesn't comply. But what's very clear and reinforces the point I am trying to make is that the minister has all the power and the health resource providers who are noted in the bill have to comply with whatever the minister tells them to do.

Let me deal with some other sections that reinforce that. If you go to section 26.2, it says very clearly under the section on compliance, "The health resource provider shall comply with an order issued under subsection (1)." Again there is no negotiation about that. They are going to be told very clearly what to do, either by the Minister of Health or by his agents in the ministry.

If you go to the section with respect to CEOs of hospitals, again it is very clear that not only throughout these provisions does the minister have the power to make orders and make compliance directives and do that unilaterally, but now the minister takes on power that wasn't even provided for, in Bill 26, by the Health Services Restructuring Commission. Now the minister takes on an additional power, which is to effectively deal with the CEO of a hospital if the minister doesn't like what he or she is doing, even though, I want to point out, CEOs of hospitals are employees of hospital boards. They are not Ministry of Health staff. But in the bill under section 26.16, it says very clearly:

"An order issued under subsection (5) may require the chief executive officer and a health resource provider"—it could be a hospital—"to comply with any directions set out in the order relating to any or all of the following:

"1. Holding back, reducing, or varying the compensation package provided to or on behalf of a chief executive officer in any manner or for any period of time as provided for in the order and despite any provision in a contract to the contrary.

"2. Requiring a chief executive officer to pay any amount of his or her compensation package to the crown or any person."

Section 7, under "compliance," "A chief executive officer and health service provider shall comply with the directions set out in the order."

The point I made at the hearings and the point I will make here again today is that that is excessive power, which is not acceptable. A CEO of a hospital board is not an employee of the minister or the Ministry of Health; that CEO is an employee of the local board. Once this section goes into effect, the first time the Minister of Health tries to exercise his unilateral power under this section, there is going to be a CEO in court making the very argument that he is not an employee of the Minister of Health and that the Minister of Health has no ability to take this kind of action. As sure as I am standing here, that is what's going to happen when this section is implemented.

The point that needs to be made about all the provisions I've just read, which clearly show it's the Minister of Health who has the unilateral power to impose orders or impose compliance directives or claw back CEO compensation, is that these are powers the Minister of Health should not have.

1700

Frankly, these are powers that I don't understand why the minister would want to have. I say that for this reason: It was very clear during the course of the hearings that the groups that came before us agreed very strongly with the notion of accountability. Boards of directors of hospitals now, like boards of directors in many other institutions, have to be accountable for a broad range of spending, for a broad range of policy decisions, for their activities. As members in a community, they are very conscious of their need to be accountable.

No party that came before the hearings said that they didn't want to be accountable, that they didn't believe in accountability. No party even said that they didn't want to enter into an accountability agreement. What the parties made very clear, and they are right about this, is that accountability is a two-way street. Where is the accountability on the part of the government in the bill, specifically, for example, with respect to ensuring that hospitals have enough funding on an ongoing daily basis to deliver the programs the ministry demands they deliver?

You see, it's not enough to set out an accountability agreement that lists in broad detail all the programming and all the services a hospital is going to undertake on behalf of the residents in their community and not also list in that same agreement the government's commitment with respect to ongoing multi-year funding to support the operation of those programs and services.

That very fundamental notion is completely absent from Bill 8. All of the accountability rests with the providers. For their part, they came to the hearings and very rightly said, "Where is the government in this negotiation? Where is the government's commitment with respect to the funding being there when we need it to deliver the programs the government demands we do in the agreement? Because if the government isn't there with its funding and we can't provide those services, is the next thing we can anticipate an order from the minister outlining what action he's going to take because we can't live up to our provision of service? Is the next action from the minister going to be a compliance directive ordering us to amalgamate services, contract out housekeeping services or contract out food services because we can't deliver on the service we promised to because we don't have enough government funding?"

That is a legitimate and fundamental point that the government members continue to miss—maybe purposely, maybe not. For this to work, it has to be a two-way street. There is nothing in the bill that guarantees that accountability will be a two-way street.

Second, it seems to me that when the government finds itself in a situation where there is a dispute between itself and a hospital board, or a board of a CCAC, and the government felt their position was correct and the hospital board felt their position was correct, it would want some kind of independent third party to deal with those issues that are in dispute, rather than having in the legislation, which the government now does, the unilateral power to override the concerns, override the questions of the hospital board and just impose a solution, whatever that solution may be.

It makes much more sense to my way of thinking that where the situation arises that there is no agreement between the two—perhaps the hospital board is saying very clearly and quite correctly, "We don't have the money to provide the services the minister wants to us deliver"—then there should be an independent mechanism for those disputes to be settled.

That was certainly the position that was taken by the Ontario Hospital Association and many of the hospitals that came before us. But it was a position that I had taken early on because I think it makes much more sense for the government to have an independent third party make those decisions because that will be seen as a fair process in the community.

I can tell you that the first time the Minister of Health issues a compliance directive or an order in a community, there is going to be vehement reaction to that by people in the community, because most people overwhelmingly support their community hospital board; they do, because it's people they know. It's people they see in the shopping mall. It's people whose sons play on the same ball teams as theirs. Especially in smaller communities, rural communities, northern communities, there is, by and large, quite overwhelming support for local hospital boards. The first time the government goes in and issues a compliance directive, you're going to see a whole hospital board resign. You're going to see chaos in that community.

You know, I'm not sure that's good for the health care of that community. I'm not sure that's good for the community at all; I don't think it is. I think the government could have easily found a way to deal with what I think will be a minimal number of areas in dispute between hospitals, and found a way to deal with those that did not require the long arm of the minister to unilaterally impose a decision, unilaterally impose an agreement or an order or a compliance directive.

I think that's the wrong way to go. I think that having those powers with the restructuring commission was the wrong way to go. Obviously, the Liberals did at that time, because they opposed it, and here we are with the government bringing in the same kinds of sweeping, draconian powers that you opposed when the former government was in power. I don't understand your way of thinking in that regard, and I don't think the Minister of Health having those kinds of broad powers is going to serve you well at all.

Second, I said earlier that I'd talk a little bit about the changes in the dates, because there has been a change in the dates by which the accountability agreements are supposed to be in place. I won't use the word "negotiated," because I don't believe that's the case.

I think what will happen very early on as the minister and his staff try to go out and negotiate accountability agreements with all of the hospitals in the province, with the CCAC boards, with the independent health facilities, and with all the long-term-care facilities—because these are all health resource providers that the ministry says it's going to enter into accountability agreements with. The moment they start to do that, they will find that they have not the human resource capacity within the Ministry of Health to do anything of the sort in the timelines that are set out.

The new provision says that the applicable number of days is 90 days, where the minister gives notice to the health resource provider under subsection (1) for the first time to develop an agreement, and 60 days in all other cases. I regret to say that I don't think the ministry has the human capacity to deal with what it has just set up under the bill, and it is doomed to fail, then. It would have made much more sense for the government to use the resources that it has to implement a number of pilot accountability agreements across the four sectors that are contemplated in the bill, because I think under that scenario, they might have had the human resources in place, available to deal with the negotiations with the hospitals to set out all of the details of the accountability

agreements, not only with the hospitals but with the other health resource providers.

Instead, the government has decided to go forward full hog with all of the resource providers, and it will be very interesting to see how the ministry will ever be able to try to manage what it has set up for itself under the bill. I don't think the ministry is going to be able to do it, and it will not be very long, I think, after the bill is implemented that the ministry itself will be out of compliance with the very provisions that it has put in the bill in terms of the time frame it expects people to meet. The ministry itself will not be able to comply with those timelines.

Third, on the section, just before I finish with it, I want to go back to a point that was made by the member from Don Valley West, who said that on May 12, when I was speaking in this House, saying that there had to be rules in place to sort out where money goes in long-term-care facilities—that as a result of the comments I made, I inadvertently made the case for this legislation, Bill 8.

I have to tell you that that would be stretching the truth. That that comment would be stretching the truth is a gross understatement. Never, never have I suggested that we need the provisions in the bill, particularly with respect to the unilateral powers of the minister. On the contrary, I have been opposed to that from the start. I repeat again: Every group that came forward said they wanted accountability. Many agreed that they would enter into accountability agreements. They had no problem with that at all. Their concern was about where the ministry was in all of this and how the ministry was going to be accountable. My concern has continued to be, because there is not a two-way street with respect to accountability, that the minister then has the power in the bill to use very sweeping powers to impose what he wants. I think that makes no sense.

The Deputy Speaker: Just one moment. I'd like the level of the chatter to go down a bit, please. Thank you. I'm listening to the member for Nickel Belt.

1710

Ms Martel: Let me conclude the part about the sweeping powers by reading to you two letters that, I think, make the case. The first is a letter addressed to Minister Smitherman on March 17. It was sent from the Ontario Hospital Association. It's still relevant, frankly, because their concerns were not addressed, even during the second round of clause-by-clause, which occurred this Monday:

"While progress has been made, the amendments made on March 9 have not yet corrected what hospitals see as the most serious aspects of the bill. We believe further changes need to be made to sufficiently safeguard the critical role of community governance of hospitals. The central problem with Bill 8 is that it gives the provincial government the power to impose anything it likes on any individual hospital, bypassing local boards—the people who know most about the hospital and the services it provides to the community."

The second letter I'd like to read from is one that was actually addressed to me from the chair, G.W. Deverell, of North Wellington Health Care. It was sent to me on April 7.

"The ministry is steadfastly painting the picture that all is well and that with the help of the province hospital governance will be fine. I have over 25 years of experience in hospital governance—and from that experience I have concluded, that will not be, the case. We need, and have historically had, real governance at the local level by voluntary boards made up of community members. This is in tune with the rural and northern health care framework. If the public wants to knowingly change that governance model, so be it. The problem with Bill 8, however, is that the change is being made in the shadow of that worthwhile and now ubiquitous term 'accountability.' The public ... don't generally understand that. It is difficult enough now to recruit good, committed volunteer board members. If Bill 8 becomes law as amended, I predict that current and prospective board members will decline the job of being local window props for the provincial level of government."

The second reason New Democrats oppose this bill has to do with the health quality council and the lack of real power, teeth, what have you, provided to them under the bill. The minister has said on more than one occasion that creation of a health quality responsibility is essentially going to make the government accountable with respect to the health care decisions it makes. I have consistently argued that it will not, and frankly, a review of the powers of the council would bear that out.

I have no problem with a health quality council being instituted. I am sure they will be very good, qualified, well-meaning people who could rise to the occasion. The problem I have is that the health quality council is not going to be able to hold the government accountable with respect to health care decisions or functions. Their functions are very limited. They appear as follows in section 4 of the bill:

"The functions of the council are,

"(a) to monitor and report to the people of Ontario on,

"(i) access to publicly funded health services,

"(ii) health human resources and publicly funded health services,

"(iii) consumer and population health status, and

"(iv) health system outcomes; and

"(b) to support continuous quality improvement."

That's all well and good, but if you wanted to give this council some real power and some real teeth, then you would also say that they also have the responsibility to make recommendations to the minister with respect to what they find as they do all of their work, to make recommendations to the minister on health policy changes, to make recommendations to the Minister of Health on health funding and where it should be directed and targeted, especially given the work they are going to do to try and identify gaps in services. They should be given the power to make recommendations about policy

changes, legislation changes and funding direction if we really want to hold them accountable.

The problem in the bill is that the only recommendations they can make to the minister are recommendations involving future areas of monitoring for them, the future areas in health care where they are going to monitor and report to the people of Ontario. You might as well tie their hands behind their back, because we have reams of reports that have been delivered by many good, well-meaning people over the years. Despite their recommendations in some of those very reports, there has been nothing to force a Minister of Health to change funding priorities, to add more funding, to change health care legislation, to make things better.

So while the minister has said repeatedly that somehow the Ontario Health Quality Council is going to make the government more accountable, there's not a thing in the legislation that will actually do that. These poor council members have the opportunity only to make recommendations about future areas of reporting that they're going to be involved in. That's it. That's the sum total of their ability to make a recommendation.

If you want to make these people truly accountable—and we should, because we're going to be spending a fair bit of money to put them in place—or make them have a purpose that will make the government be accountable, then you give them the power to make recommendations from the work they do. When they monitor and report on issues, they should have the power to make recommendations about health care changes to make sure that the work they do doesn't just sit on the shelf.

I think, if the minister were being honest with people and telling them very clearly that these folks were going to be accountable, the government would have made the changes necessary to ensure that the council had the ability to make recommendations for sweeping change in health care. That hasn't happened. So, despite the fact that I'm sure some good and well-meaning people will come forward, I regret to say that I think much of their work is just going to end up sitting on the shelf. I think that will be very regrettable indeed.

The third reason that we, as New Democrats, have opposed this bill is that the bill does nothing—zero, nada—to make any changes to the further privatization of health care in Ontario—changes begun under the Conservatives and, regrettably, continued under the Liberals despite some very specific election promises that were made. We have opposed this because the members of the government, and the minister himself, on many occasions have tried to say that this bill protects medicare and makes sure that we don't have two-tier health care in Ontario.

When you look at the track record of the Liberals on this issue, you see that nothing is further from the truth. Let me deal with a couple of examples—P3 hospitals, for starters. This is what the Premier said with respect to P3 hospitals before the election: "What I take issue with is the mechanism. We believe in public ownership and public financing (of health care)"—emphasis on the words "public financing." "I will take these hospitals and bring them inside the public sector," said Dalton McGuinty to the Ottawa Citizen on Wednesday, May 28, 2003.

In the same article he is quoted as saying, "Mr McGuinty believes that public-private sector partnerships in health care would ultimately cost the province more money than traditional arrangements. He says such arrangements would be discontinued and the hospitals returned to full public ownership."

Well, here we are, eight months after the election: P3 hospitals still underway in Brampton and Ottawa; no change in the structure in terms of a public-private partnership; and no change whatsoever in the financing, which is going to be done by the private consortium, while the public gets stuck with the bill. That was a very specific election promise made by the Premier.

All that has been done is that the Conservative lease has now become a Liberal mortgage. But the traditional hospital financing that the Premier promised is not in place for Brampton and Ottawa. As a result the public, especially the public in Brampton and Ottawa, is going to pay far more for this hospital than if it had been done through a capital grant.

Let me make a couple of points in this regard. The fact of the matter is that, traditionally, we have used capital grants that have been provided by the government to support hospital construction and reconstruction and the community has had to pay a local share. Those capital grants have been obtained by the government, which goes out and borrows money, and because government is such a big player in that system, it can get the best deal in terms of the lowest interest rate.

Under the scenario that's now in place, of course, the private sector consortium is going to go out and borrow the money for financing. You will know that they're going to pay more in terms of rate of interest for the amount of money they're going to borrow. So they're going to go out and borrow the money and it's going to cost us more on that one front.

Second, because it's a private sector consortium, they're going to want—they're going to demand, frankly—a cut, repayment for the work they do on behalf of the public for this project. So of course now we're going to be paying for the profit of the private sector consortium to do that hospital construction project.

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Now the public is paying twice. We are paying more because the cost of interest is more, and we're paying now to support the profit of the private sector consortium. That is money that, I have argued consistently through the hearings, should be spent on patient care and patient services, not on the profit of the for-profit consortium.

The second change, and this is a very dramatic one as well, is that before, it used to be provided as a capital grant; now you have a mortgage that the hospital will have to assume. The hospital will have to pay mortgage payments on this hospital construction. The hospital will

pay these mortgage payments through the operating grant of their hospital. Operating grant money has been traditionally used to support staff and services and programs that are offered in the hospital, not to pay for bricks and mortar.

Before we are done, I'm quite concerned that both of these two hospitals, if these deals do continue to go ahead—and there are efforts to stop them, thank goodness, and build them in the public sector, where they should be, where the Premier promised. What I see happening is that down the road a hospital won't be able to make the mortgage payment, and suddenly you have a hospital making decisions to cut staff, cut programs, cut services—all of which patients require—because they're trying to find the money they need to pay the mortgage. This is the wrong way to be financing a hospital; absolutely the wrong way.

I believe, and Premier McGuinty promised, that we should not be moving ahead with private-public partnerships; we should be funding hospital construction in the way we traditionally have done. But this Liberal government, after the election, didn't do what it promised. We have essentially the same private-public partnership deal, scheme, set in place by the Tories, now operated under the Liberals. I can guarantee that people in Brampton and in Ottawa are going to pay more as a result. Their programs and their services will be put at risk if that hospital can't afford to make the mortgage payments through the operating grant.

I think Premier McGuinty should have done what he promised. He was very clear in the election. I think people in those communities voted for him because of that promise, and he should have lived up to it, but he hasn't. So it's pretty difficult for the government to argue that they're not supporting two-tier health in this bill when they're continuing with the same P3 hospital scheme that was put in place by the Tories.

Let me give you the second example. This has to do with the private CAT scans and private MRIs. Here's what the Liberals said in their election platform:

"The Harris-Eves government opened private, two-tier MRI and CT clinics. These clinics will sell a variety of scans alongside public services, giving quicker access to those who can afford to buy their way to the front of the line.

"We will cancel the Harris-Eves private clinics and replace them with public services. The Romanow commission proved there is no evidence to support expanding private diagnostic services.

"Many communities have already raised money for a new MRI or CT scan for their local hospital, but have been denied operating funding by the Harris-Eves government. Instead of opening private clinics, we will work with these communities to expand access in the public system."

Here we are, eight months later, and we have seven—at least seven—private MRI and CAT scan clinics operating in the province, and this government has done nothing to shut them down; nothing. Despite the very clear election promise—the quotes I read to you are from the Liberal health platform, and there are other promises made with respect to the same issue before and through the election—here we are, eight months later, and those same private CAT scan clinics that the Liberals were oh, so opposed to before and during the election are still up and operating in Ontario. The same for-profit, private scheme for MRI clinics put in place by the Tories is still operating under the Liberals.

When I hear Liberal members talk to me about how Bill 8 will protect medicare, I have to say, "Are you joking?" I have to laugh. If you were truly interested in protecting medicare, you would have shut them down, just like you promised. They wouldn't be operating today, and they are. We see no evidence that they're going to be shut down in the near future either. Why is it that we are using health care dollars, dollars that should go to patients instead, to go to profits for the folks who operate private clinics? The government is right: These are the kinds of things that allow you to buy your way to the front of the line. If that's what you believed before the election, why haven't you shut them down? Why are they still operating?

It is not enough to say, as the minister did in the budget, "We're going to open some new MRIs next year." What about the ones you promised you were going to close? What about the ones that are eating up dollars that should be used for patient care, and instead see those dollars transferred into the profit line of the for-profit companies that operate them? Shut them down, just like you promised. Otherwise, everything you say about Bill 8 and protecting medicare is just rhetoric, just nonsense.

Let me give you another example. This has to do with competitive bidding in home care. We got this during the hearings. We got this when we were in Ottawa. We had a woman before us who worked for a CCAC. She gave a very articulate presentation about how competitive bidding was really destroying home care. She talked about the many players in the system now who are all trying to get their hands on money, money that should be going into direct patient care. She made it clear that competitive bidding in home care had resulted in lowering the wages of workers in that sector and had also reduced the quality of care to those people who need home care.

Is the government doing anything about shutting down competitive bidding in home care, about the private sector being involved in home care delivery? No. I don't understand why not. I particularly don't understand why not when all I hear is government rhetoric about how Bill 8 is protecting medicare. If you want to protect medicare, shut down competitive bidding in home care, so that you can actually have people who make a decent wage in this sector, as they should, given the important work they do, and so you can be assured of continuity of care for patients who use home care. Right now, every time a contract comes up, in too many CCACs, somebody else gets a contract, there are new people in there and there is no continuity of care for the people who need it, who rely

on important home care services. But I don't hear the government talking about that at all.

If you look at the preamble of the bill—I guess for me that's where I really see the contradiction between the government rhetoric about protecting medicare and what is really happening—it says, for example:

"The people of Ontario and their government:"—I assume that means this government—

"Confirm their enduring commitment to the principles of public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability and accessibility ...

"Continue to support the prohibition of two-tier medicine, extra billing and user fees...."

Just take a look at the most recent budget. If that budget isn't a contradiction with respect to the preamble to Bill 8—the bill talks about universality, prohibition of two-tier medicine. We've got three services that have been covered under OHIP that are now going to be delisted courtesy of this government: eye care, chiropractic care and physiotherapy.

Those are covered now under OHIP, in some cases all of the cost, in some a portion of the cost. OHIP is now covering some of those costs for those important essential health care services. The government talks about two-tier medicine. I can tell you that as soon as you delist health care services from OHIP and people have to pay out of their own pocket for the services, you just increase two-tier medicine in Ontario.

Those who can afford to pay for some of those services will be able to afford to get them and those who can't will go without. That's what two-tier medicine is all about. That's what you folks said you were going to work against in Bill 8. Then you go to the budget and see the services that are being delisted, and all you can conclude is that the government is just continuing to move down that road of two-tier medicine. How else would you describe it when you cut services that are now being paid for by OHIP and those who can afford to pay for them will get them and those who can't will do without?

That is a wrong-headed decision. You will not save any money delisting these essential services and you sure will negatively impact the quality of health care of people who need these essential services. That's just one example of the contradiction in the preamble of the bill that the Liberals have talked so much about and what's really happening under them.

The final one has to with the delisting powers—I didn't mention this but I should have—that are in the budget bill itself. In the budget bill the minister is now going to have the unilateral power to delist drugs from the Ontario drug benefit plan. There is no reason at all for the minister to have that power.

I was part of the Provincial Auditor's committee where the auditor talked about giving him the power so that he could approve drugs that were already recommended by the DQTC. I can tell you, the auditor never said the minister should have the power to delist. Get rid of that section of the bill. He should not have that power. It should stay the same in terms of cabinet having to make that decision, not the minister all on his or her own.

In conclusion, as I finish up, let me say: We've opposed this bill from the start and we will continue to because of the unilateral powers to the minister, the fact that the health quality council can't hold the government accountable, and the fact that it does nothing to stop further privatization of health care in Ontario.

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Mr McMeekin: I want to begin by observing in passing my admiration for the member from Simcoe North, who generally speaks a lot of sense and raises a lot of good questions. He obviously drew the short straw. He was talking about us having problems over on this side of the House. I noted with some sympathy that he was largely abandoned by his colleagues, but I want to say he made some really good points.

A lot of people are going to cover a lot of technical things. I remember mom saying to me once, "You wouldn't worry about what people thought of you if you realized just how often they did." I want to use that as an entree to say that we can get off on a lot of tangents here, but I want to look at some of the things specifically about this bill that I don't think have been touched on.

I want to just point out, in starting, that many people on this side of the House were mentored and inspired to get into politics by Pierre Trudeau. I thought Mr Trudeau was an incredibly inspiring person-mentor, but I was inspired and encouraged to consider public service by Tommy Douglas, my good friend. I had the privilege of coming to know Mr Douglas quite well. We actually became friends and spent some time together, talking about a number of things, including health care. I recall that Mr Douglas introduced medicare in Saskatchewan—very necessary—but he was the first person to bring in premiums, and everybody paid the same amount. It wasn't graduated. Everybody paid the same—

Mr O'Toole: Your government cancelled them.

Mr McMeekin: We've made a lot of progress since then. We've got a tax system inspired by him, a tax system, because he fought for that too, that's graduated. People pay different amounts.

On the OHIP premium, I want to say that one of the things that hasn't been said very much is that those who earn over a certain income—I'm not even quite sure where it kicks in—pay a health care premium, I think an extra 4%.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): A surtax.

Mr McMeekin: A surtax that Michael Colle might want to speak about.

I want to disabuse people on the lack of progressiveness in this particular issue. When we did our consultations around the province, it was interesting to note that 72% of those we spoke to said government had to be about changing the way it delivers services, and some 76%, specifically as it relates to health care, said, "This isn't rocket science. You're going to have to raise some additional revenues to pay for it." In fact, their suggestion

was that we look at raising taxes, if that's what we had to do.

We heard that in virtually all of the—it's not rocket science. If you want to have 24/7, community-based, multidisciplinary health care, if you want to shorten waiting lists for cancer assessment, cardiac assessment, surgeries, if you want more nurse practitioners, if you want better long-term care and if you want to do what Mr Romanow suggests and that's to put a diversified spectrum of home care options as part of the health care basket, that costs money, right?

It's money we need to look at, particularly when you come to government and suddenly discover you've got an $8-billion revenue shortfall. It's like that old Woody Allen film: "There are two things wrong with this restaurant: The food is awful and the portions are far too small." The reality is that the buck has got to stop somewhere. You've got to make some tough decisions and we've certainly done that.

I also want to take a few minutes just to disabuse, those who may be watching at home, the notion that there's anything sweeping or draconian about accountbility, or that there's anything, necessarily, to the case that some are trying to make that moving through a system where we're now bringing about a health care premium, with a promise that all the money generated is going to be used exclusively to promote better community-based health care, is somehow going to push a two-tier system. I think that's nonsense. In fact, I think a better case could be made for, say, when people make a contribution over and above their tax, that it actually is going to raise their expectations about their health care system; it's going to get them, by design, more involved in discussion. This bill is a lot about that. It's about accountability agreements.

I also want to disabuse those who may be watching that there's anything in this bill that attacks negotiated contracts of workers out there. It's nonsense. We talked about this in the hearings themselves. This doesn't threaten contracts. It may have consequences for chief executive officers who don't fulfill the obligations of the contract they've negotiated with the ministry, but front-line workers—that's just silly.

By the way, there's nothing sweepingly draconian about providing yearly reports to the people of Ontario about how we're shortening waiting lists or how we're accommodating more surgeries and more of our vulnerable elderly and others in home care. There's nothing draconian about hiring 8,000 new nurses. Can you think of anything sweepingly draconian about that? I can't, although I do agree with the member from Nickel Belt that we need to look at the competitive bidding issue. I think that's a real problem.

It used to be that agencies would work together, they'd collaborate together, they'd share information, but a lot of home care agencies today have become cannibalistic. They hoard information. They don't share, and it's because eventually they're going to have to bid for a contract. I know the Minister of Health, from conversations I've had with him, is going to be looking at that as well. So I wanted to make those points.

I also want to say that there's nothing sweepingly draconian about primary care reform that would see 150 new community-based, multidisciplinary health care units across Ontario. My spouse happens to be in a community-based primary care unit, probably the longest-serving one in Ontario, some 30 years. It provides wonderful care. We know first hand. There's nothing draconian about that, or about trying to acknowledge that people who end up in emergency rooms because they don't have family doctors need to have access to family doctors so that we can turn that around. Hospitals can better invest the monies they have access to, providing the care that right now is monitored vis-à-vis the length of the waiting list.

I also want to make reference very specifically to a part of the bill that I think has been missed. But just by way of footnote I want to touch first on the whole issue of dollars, and where's the government. You know, hospital health care has been going up, I think, about 12%, 13% a year over the last four years, where funding for community-based home care has been decreased, and in some cases eliminated in communities. But section 20 of Bill 8, on the Ontario health council, talks specifically about the principle of accountability being a fundamental sixth leg added to the Canada Health Act.

By the way, just as an aside, the three services that were delisted aren't Canada Health Act services, just so you know. So many of the arguments that were made about them are by definition less than complete.

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In section 20, there's reference to accountability. Then it talks about public interest extensively. It talks about, "The minister and the Lieutenant Governor in Council may exercise any authority under this part" to guarantee certain things.

Here's a list of those draconian things that some want to talk about that are included in this. What's draconian about "clear roles and responsibilities regarding the proper management of the health care system and any health resource provider"? What's draconian about "shared and collective responsibilities"? Is there anything draconian about "transparency," "quality improvement," "fiscal responsibility"—I'm reading from the act—or "value for money" or "public reporting" of progress using best practices? Is there anything draconian about the insistence on "consistency" and "trust" in the health care system or "reliance on evidence"? Again, best practices. To that we added timeliness and a guarantee of accessibility.

So I want to say that this isn't perfect, but it's sure as heck not sweepingly draconian. The buck's got to stop somewhere. This government's prepared to end the silly ride we've been on and begin to develop those community-based health care facilities by targeting areas that need help. I see my friend from Simcoe North is coming back in, a brave man who speaks a lot of common sense most of the time.

I want to say, that's where this government is. We'll stand on this. We've made a lot of progress since those early years of Tommy Douglas. We'll continue to make more progress as we talk to the stakeholders and our communities about the most important issue they tell us they have, and that's a strong health care system in Ontario.

Mr Delaney: It's my privilege to stand and speak in support of Bill 8 today. Like many in the House, I'm a member of the baby boom generation. We baby boomers are living longer, living healthier and living better, but despite all of that, we're also just getting older.

I listened earlier today to the moving tributes to our D-Day veterans. Those are our parents. Those are our children's grandparents. Old age used to mean poverty and neglect. In our last generation, the generation we praised earlier today, they redefined it to "life with independence and dignity."

Our challenge, to follow them, is to extend the concept of universal, accessible and sustainable health care—the pressure from those of us in our baby boom generation who will begin to turn 60 in the next two to three years—through the years when we cease being net contributors to the system and begin to be net recipients of health care.

Moreover, health care means more than caring for the baby boom demographic bulge. Bill 8 is about how health care in Ontario touches and helps everyone at every stage of life.

Our predecessors in government slashed health care for their first five years. Then they threw money at it for their next three years. Ontario ended up spending $28 billion on health care annually, the single largest budget item. But I ask members here, was health care more accessible in 2003 than it had been eight years before? No, it wasn't. Was health care more reliable in 2003 than it had been eight years before? Did more Ontarians have a family doctor in 2003 than was the case eight years ago? No.

Clearly Ontario needs better than the same old things. Ontario knows that if you do the same old things in the same old way, then you'll get the same old outcomes. That's just unacceptable for Ontario. That needs to be changed. That's why we're doing things differently with Bill 8.

Roy Romanow's report laid out a framework of what Ontarians want. Bill 8 aims to take Mr Romanow's report and turn it into results that Ontarians can see in their hospital waiting rooms, in their parents' long-term-care facilities and in the health of their children.

Why do we need Bill 8? Because right now, other than handing over a cheque to a health care provider, there's very little the Ministry of Health can do to either affect the outcomes in health care or measure the cost-effectiveness of how Ontario's health care resources are focused and spent.

Bill 8's key word is "accountability," and many of the deputants who talked to us during the hearings agreed. Lakeridge Health in Durham region, for example—and I use their own words—agrees with many of the broad goals behind Bill 8, such as the creation of the Ontario Health Quality Council to monitor and report on important health care indicators for Ontarians.

I'd like to talk about that Ontario Health Quality Council for the balance of my time. "Accountability" means that the outcomes that Bill 8 will measure will be public. "Public" means that those outcomes will be tabled here in this Legislature, where our accustomed high quality of debate will assist the public in achieving the goal of transparency.

Let's show Ontarians just what they're getting for their money. The Ontario Health Quality Council will be an independent, objective body. It will report to the public through the Legislature. In business, we know the mandate of the Ontario Health Quality Council by other names. We call them key success factors. We call them metrics. We call it management by objectives. We call it a host of other terms. In essence, how do you know you're doing well? Often, during the hearings, I asked some of the deputants, "How do you measure or undertake on an ongoing basis to quantify the efficiency, the accountability and the value for money within your facility so you can measure progress and identify areas of concern?" Most often, the answers were vague.

The Ontario Health Quality Council will track the performance of the health system by measuring the same things, measuring them the same way and measuring them year after year, so that we can track changes, measure progress, identify problems and opportunities and target people and money. We know that simply throwing money at a problem almost never does anything except waste the money, worsen the problem and leave the potential beneficiaries bitter at the failure.

We don't believe that a private system is the answer. No nation on earth spends more money on health care than the United States of America. No nation on earth spends so much more so ineffectively. We want our health care resources spent on health care, not on collection of bad debt, not on sky-high malpractice insurance, not on litigation costs, not on profit and incentives, not on marketing, sales and advertising and not on enormous executive salaries and bonuses. We feel our Ontario health care expenses should treat children, keep seniors in their homes and use our hospitals more effectively.

Bill 8 and the budget's health care premiums get a thumbs-up from my own hospital in Mississauga West, the Credit Valley Hospital. Bill 8 is one of the ways Ontario's government will keep its commitments to all Ontarians, to ensure quality health care, universal health care, accessible health care, comprehensive health care and compassionate health care to all Ontarians, young and old.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to join the debate. In the early stages of this bill I had the privilege of being the Chair of the justice and social policy committee as we did the public hearings after first reading. As a result of that I was unable to speak to it, or

felt I shouldn't speak to it in the House in order to maintain that impartiality. Now that I'm not Chair any more I can speak my mind on this bill.

If you take a look at the concept of public health care in Canada, you have to think of some names that aren't necessarily associated with the Liberal Party. You think of names like J.S. Woodsworth, Tommy Douglas, Stanley Knowles and George Cadbury, if you go back to the days of the Ginger Group and perhaps even the CCF. But once that principle was established, people were looking for a government that they could entrust with the management of that health care system.

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As the health care system began to define us as a country, we realized it wasn't just enough to be in favour of the principles or to be in favour of the concept behind public health care, but that somebody had to manage the system in a businesslike fashion. I think what we've been able to do with Bill 8 is to start to introduce some of the discipline that people use in their own lives, in their business lives and in their own family. We've been able to inject some of that private sector accountability and that private sector business discipline into the health care system, not by introducing private health care, by any means, but by way of introducing accountability agreements. We see that this has to be managed properly. Taxpayers expect us to manage those funds properly and they understand that on a yearly basis we should be able to report back to the public and say, "Here's how we've used your tax dollars. Here's how we've maintained a single-tier public health system in this province." I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think all parties should be embracing that concept. Taxpayers simply expect accountability.

When you look at some of the amendments that have been made to the bill since its introduction after first reading, I think there have been some substantial amendments that have shown that this is a government that's prepared to listen to people. When people come forward at public hearings to committees, when they bring forward good ideas, this government is prepared, to the extent possible, to introduce and try to include some of those ideas in the bill.

I think you can look through some of the amendments very specifically. For example, some members of the labour movement came forward and said, "If you bring in accountability agreements, you're going to open up collective agreements and all sorts of bad things are going to happen." We learned very quickly that that was scaremongering, that that was a hoax. We were able to put that idea to rest.

We also had people come forward and say, "If you introduce Bill 8, you'll be taking away that tremendous role that volunteers have played on our hospital boards, in the running of our hospitals and on auxiliaries. Hospital boards will quit in droves. You just won't have those volunteers to rely on." When you think of the respect and the honour that volunteers bring to the role in a hospital system, no government in its right mind would suggest we do anything along those lines, and is certainly what this doesn't do in that.

Just imagine having to replace those volunteers. Imagine the cost involved in having to replace the volunteers who help in the running of our hospitals. It would simply be madness to try to drive people out of the system.

We've got a health quality council that's going to report back. When you look at the roles of hospitals in our community, it's an accountability that people expect; it's an accountability that they're going to receive under Bill 8.

Who is supporting Bill 8? Who should be supporting Bill 8? Anybody who agrees on accountability—

Interjections.

Mr Flynn: I'm glad the third party has raised that. Who was one of the first governments in Canada to cut health care funding? It was the New Democratic Party, that's who it was. Who closed 8,000 hospital beds? It was the New Democratic Party. Who had that long-sighted policy of cutting medical school spaces? Who put us in the position that we're in today? The NDP, the very people who should have been supporting, the very people who should have been paying honour to the system that Tommy Douglas introduced, were the ones who betrayed it the most when they had the opportunity to run that system.

The facts are very clear: You cut hospital funding, you capped doctors' fees, you cut medical school spaces and you even cut the number of foreign-trained physicians who were trying to enter this province. Now you sit here and say, "We're not going to support Bill 8." You had an opportunity—

Mr Dunlop: Hey, buddy, whose approval rating is at 27%?

Mr Flynn: Hey, don't. If the Tories want to start in on their record, I'd be quite happy to go there as well.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Flynn: I'd be quite happy to go there as well. People know what the Tories did to the hospitals. People know quite clearly.

OK, we've had some fun, Speaker.

We simply believe in this party that single-tier public health care is the best kind of health care. The health of our people is the most precious resource. The Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act will provide enduring protection for that system. We think it's an important step that strengthens our public health care system and restores confidence in it. God knows, after being managed by those two parties, it needs confidence restored in it. You ask anybody in Ontario.

We've actively listened to our health care partners. We listened to the public input during public hearings. We've introduced amendments. I strongly support Bill 8 and urge all members to.

The Deputy Speaker: Are we ready for the question?

Mr Caplan has moved third reading of Bill 8.

Is it the pleasure of House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

I have received a request for deferral from the chief government whip. The vote is accordingly deferred until Monday, June 7, during deferred votes.

It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1758.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 3 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 3 juin 2004

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 2, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures / Projet de loi 83, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): The Chair recognizes the member for Nickel Belt.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Speaker, again, I just love this place so much.

The Deputy Speaker: I know.

Ms Martel: The same Speaker is here.

We've got a different item here this evening. I want to tell you why we're opposed to the budget bill. I want to deal first with what the government is doing to delist drugs from the Ontario drug benefit program.

My colleague Marilyn Churley raised this issue in question period earlier this week. She said, "I have a question for the Premier," asking him why the government was amending section 20 of the Ontario Drug Benefit Act "to allow the health minister to take drugs off the formulary without going to cabinet." The Premier said the following in his first response: "I hope that the additional research dollars will be of some benefit, sooner rather than later." Then he went on to say, "We made a very specific commitment during the campaign to accelerate the process by which we can introduce generic drugs on to the formulary, and that's what we're doing, and that's going to be good for Ontarians."

My colleague Ms Churley raised this again and said, "Why are you giving the Minister of Health the authority to delist drugs from the formulary without having to go and get cabinet approval?" Mr McGuinty again denied that that's what the Liberals are doing and said the following: "All we've done through this particular provision is to enable the minister to fast-track the introduction of generics. That's what this is all about," that there is nothing hidden beyond that. "There is nothing that we're trying to do that is beyond that."

So Ms Churley tried for the third time in the same afternoon, and now told the Premier to actually open the bill and read it so he might understand what's going on. She said to him, "Turn to page 13 of the bill and look at section 20(1), where it says, under the heading 'Delisting,' 'The Lieutenant Governor in Council or the minister may remove the designation of a drug product as a listed drug product even if none of the conditions prescribed under clause 18(1)(b.1) are breached.'"

She asked that question of the Premier. What did the Premier do? He had no answer. This time he referred it to the Minister of Health. So much for the research in the Premier's office.

But Mr Smitherman said the following, "I'm pleased to confirm for the member that the intent of this section is for the fast-tracking of generics to make sure that Ontarians have prompt access to these drugs and to the benefit of the taxpayers." That's not the question. The question is, why are you giving yourself the authority to delist drugs from the formulary, not to list. Mr Smitherman doesn't have very good research either, because he tells us one more time that "the intent is absolutely clear. It is the fast-tracking of generic drugs for the purpose of making sure that the government of Ontario takes advantage, at the earliest date possible, once the federal government has done their" pricing, "to make sure we've got those cheap drugs available as quickly as possible."

I'm all in favour of the minister having the ability to make sure that generic drugs get on to the formulary as quickly as possible, because the Provincial Auditor in the 2003 report noted that the Ontario government is losing hundreds of thousands of dollars, indeed millions, every year because the process is so slow to get products on to the formulary after a recommendation has been made by the Drug Quality and Therapeutics Committee to add those same drugs to the formulary. In fact, Ontario is losing about $17 million over a two-year period because of that particular problem.

I'm quite in favour of the ministry's fast-tracking the process, so that once we have a positive recommendation from the DQTC, the minister has the approval to add that drug to the formulary, as happens in other provinces. We had that confirmed at a public hearing about this issue in February this year, when the ministry was before us.

But I can tell you that the Provincial Auditor didn't also say that the minister himself should have the power to delist drugs from the formulary unilaterally, without going to cabinet, as is the current process—just willy-nilly sign a paper so that those drugs are delisted. The auditor didn't say anything about that in his recommendations, nor did the auditor's staff say the same during the public hearings in February, nor did the Ministry of

Health staff say they were planning anything the same when they answered questions about this very issue in the public accounts committee in public hearings in February.

So why, oh why, do we now have a provision in this bill that gives the Minister of Health the unilateral power, without having to go to cabinet, to delist drugs? I think the reason is that after we finish with this budget, which delists important health care services like chiropractic, eye care and physiotherapy, the minister is then going to take the axe to the Ontario drug benefit program and willy-nilly, merrily, start delisting any number of drugs so that Ontarians have to pay for those themselves, even though this very government, before the election, promised they would not make changes and do that to the Ontario drug benefit program.

I think the government should take a serious second look at this very important issue. We have proven through our research what they should have known through theirs, unless they were really trying to hide something, which is what I really think was being done. I think we have now made the point to them, and this government should take a sober second look at what is a very negative provision to the ODB and not—not—allow the Minister of Health to unilaterally delist drugs from the Ontario drug benefit program. Let me give the government a little bit of time to do that: I move adjournment of the debate at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms Churley has moved adjournment of the debate.

Interjection: Ms Churley?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Ms Martel has moved adjournment of the debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1852 to 1922.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will stand and remain standing.

Take your seats.

All those opposed will stand and remaining standing.

Take your seats.

Deputy Clerk (Ms Deborah Deller): The ayes are 10; the nays are 28.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated. The member for Nickel Belt.

Ms Martel: Let me deal with another issue with respect to the budget that the Liberals need to take a second look at; that is, the very regressive, very unfair premium or health tax that is going to be implemented by this government, ostensibly to pay for health care. It's interesting to note that nowhere in the budget is there a description that there will be a special-purpose account set up to actually ensure that that money does go to health care. We'll wait and see. But this is a horribly regressive new tax, and what's most interesting about it is that it's a tax which Mr McGuinty himself, before the election, also described as very unfair and regressive.

Here is what he said earlier this year: "Ontario Liberals oppose the return of OHIP premiums because they are a tax hike on working families." Of course, he is absolutely right about that. That's exactly what they are. Two years ago, during the Conservative leadership race, this is what he said when Chris Stockwell proposed OHIP premiums: "Families are already paying for health care with their taxes. Pay more for health care, pay twice for health care, but get less health care—that's the Tory plan. It's certainly not the Liberal plan."

"Stockwell may want to raise taxes by charging families an additional $1,000 a year for health care. I do not," said Mr McGuinty.

How times have changed after an election. Isn't that interesting? There he was signing that protection pledge, smiling into the cameras, saying, "I'm not going to raise your taxes. I'm particularly not going to raise taxes on health." What does he do after the election? Sock it right to modest- and middle-income families who can least afford another tax.

I've heard Liberals say they didn't have a choice. They certainly did have another choice, and I'm going to get to the other choice after I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms Martel has moved adjournment of the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1926 to 1956.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will please stand.

OK, take your seats.

All those opposed, please stand.

Take your seats, please.

Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 10; the nays are 27.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost. The member for Nickel Belt.

Ms Martel: I said the Liberals had other choices. Let me tell you what those other choices were. They could have cancelled the 35% tax cuts for wealthy Ontarians, which were put in place by the Conservatives for people who are making over $100,000 and can afford to contribute more. They should have closed the loophole in the employer health tax, which is giving a huge financial benefit to some of the biggest corporations in Ontario. They could have returned to the 1999 corporate income tax rates, which were very competitive with all the US jurisdictions we trade with.

But instead of making those changes, which would have ensured that those wealthy corporations and wealthy Ontarians who can afford to make a greater contribution actually did, this government decided to whack it to modest- and middle-income families. That's what is so upsetting about the budget; that's what is so offensive

about it. The premium itself is completely regressive, and that premium, along with all the other hikes, will put a huge, significant financial burden on Ontario working families.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I, quite frankly, was a bit disappointed by the presentation made by the member for Nickel Belt, and the reason is, I realize there are some philosophical differences between our party and the New Democratic Party, but I think everyone in this House would agree that we share something in common; that is, over the last eight or nine years we have fought a government that has starved our services, that has starved education and health care. Together, we have joined to oppose them. Together, we went into the last election and spoke about solving the problems facing health care and education.

What I expected tonight was that the member for Nickel Belt would stand up and say, "Good for you, government, that you're going to reduce waiting times for cancer care. Good for you, government, that you're going to provide 36,000 more cardiac procedures. Good for you, government, that you're going to provide 2,340 more joint replacements every year. Good for you, government, that when it comes to issues like a doctor shortage, you're going to invest in 150 new family health centres." But no, all we're hearing is criticism.

2000

The member from Nickel Belt dared to stand up and talk about how we should have taxed the rich. Well, I ask, where was the New Democratic Party when we brought forward legislation to cancel the private school tax credit? They were siding with the Conservatives. They were siding with the Conservatives to reinstate, to keep—

Interjections.

Mr Milloy: Where was the New Democratic Party when we came forward and said, "Let's roll back the proposed corporate tax cuts of the previous government"? They were with the Conservatives, voting in favour of the rich.

We had a plan in this campaign. The plan was to fix our services, education and health care, and this budget has delivered on them.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Questions and comments?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to respond to the insightful comments made by the member from Nickel Belt, because I can compliment her on her passion for public health. She owns that territory, and she did try in her remarks to hold the Premier accountable. I think it's a worthy task; however, for a government that has failed to keep any promise to date, I think her task is in vain. I'm not surprised that she moved time allocation, by any stretch of the imagination.

You have to look around their caucus. There are questions among themselves. This is the single sign of hope that I've seen, that even among themselves there are some who still have a conscience. It's reassuring.

I look across the row at the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, Jim Brownell. He's here tonight. He said he wasn't happy with everything in the budget. Do the right thing tonight. Make a stand tonight and do the right thing. Stand for the principle of public health, not for taxes on health, not for delisting. That's the point that was being made by the member from Nickel Belt. But he's not alone in this. This is encouraging. If nothing else, this is encouraging.

Phil McNeely, the member from Ottawa-Orléans, called the budget brutal. Now, I think that's a fairly polite word permitted here in the House, but he insists that new tax was required to improve—they never said that during the election. This budget is a complete charade of what you promised during the election. That's the disappointment here.

Kim Craitor from Niagara Falls demanded—but you know, he's not alone as well. I think the member from Prince Edward-Hastings—he's not here tonight—is in some trouble because he's contradicted himself. He said this on television, and Frank Klees had the transcript—

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. The member for Durham, I'd appreciate it if you'd watch the clock almost as closely as I do.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member who just spoke was referring to the attendance of another member, which is not permitted in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: That's a point of order. Thank you. I would remind all members that we're not to point out the absence of other members.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to commend the member for accentuating the fact that his colleague was absent from the House.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On the same point of order, Mr Speaker: I missed the reference. Which member was he referring to who was not here?

The Deputy Speaker: That's the end of the points of order. The member for Beaches-East York.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is indeed an honour for me to comment on my colleague from Nickel Belt. As always, she speaks passionately, she speaks with authority, and she knows of what she speaks.

I also had an opportunity to listen to the member from Kitchener Centre, and although his colleagues gave him a standing ovation, I can only feel sorry for him. I can only feel sorry because he lacks all the history of this place and what happened before. He lacks any clue of what happened when the Liberals sat on this side of the House.

Yes, the Liberals were courageous in those days. At least some of them attacked what was very bad Tory policy. I will agree that they did do that. However, in government you act more like the Tories than the Tories themselves. You bring in legislation that they wouldn't dare bring in. You bring in health premiums that they wouldn't dare bring in. You bring in regressive legis-

lation that they just wouldn't do. You are sticking it to the people that they were afraid to stick it to.

I want to tell you, when you speak, you speak as if you are a True Believer. It takes me back to my university days, an excellent little book by Eric Hoffer on the True Believer. That is a person who, in spite of all the facts, in spite of everything that is there, has an ideology that will not let him or her actually see it. I want to tell you, you fit that mould perfectly. I recommend the book to you. I think you should read it. If you want to know how you speak, you speak as a True Believer.

What we need to do here is get on with the real debate. The real debate is what is happening to the people of Ontario. The real debate in part is—and I would agree with you that there are good things in the budget—where you're getting the money to pay for it. The real thing is where you're getting the money to pay for it. The way you're getting the money to pay for it is regressive and wrong. That is why we in the New Democratic Party will not support you on this budget. At least half of what you are doing is wrong.

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): It's a pleasure to stand in support of the budget. I find it absolutely fascinating that the member from Nickel Belt will stand with such outrageousness on the issue of the budget, when that particular party added so significantly to the deficit of this province by hundreds of millions of dollars, and left a legacy from the social contract that we are all still reeling from.

Then I look to the other side, to the party that took $2 billion out of education and, to quote Justice Archie Campbell, put in place "the greatest draconian piece of legislation since the War Measures Act that he had ever seen." That was Bill 169. So this incredible indignation across the way is really a lot of theatrics going on, instead of dealing with the substantive issues of the fact that this province has a crushing deficit.

Responsible government deals with the issues at hand and doesn't make easy decisions. They make difficult decisions, given the times that they live within. They make decisions that have sustainability and will leave a legacy for the children of this province that won't continue to contribute to that outstanding deficit that was left by the two previous governments.

I think it's time that people sit back and read the budget, not just listen to the rhetoric that's going on across. They will recognize that it will make a significant difference in the lives of all of us. You're right that it isn't easy to make difficult decisions, but leadership never is easy if it's leadership that's effective.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nickel Belt has two minutes to reply.

Ms Martel: Let me say to all Liberals, no one believes any promises that you make any more, either in the election or in the budget, because your track record is so pathetic. You were the group that broke the promise of keeping the hydro cap in place. You were the group that broke the promise to stop the development of 6,000 houses on the Oak Ridges moraine. You're the group that broke the promise to reduce auto insurance by 20%. You're the group that broke the promise to autistic kids, and you still discriminate against them when they turn age six.

You're the group that broke the most important election promise. There was Dalton McGuinty smiling into the camera, signing that paper, saying, "I won't raise taxes." Here we are with this budget. This budget is putting it to modest- and low-income families on any number of levels: with the new health tax, with the increase in hydro that comes in the budget, with the increase in sin taxes, and the list goes on and on.

So no one believes the promises you made in the election and no one believes the promises that you make in the budget now. You have a serious, serious credibility gap, folks. Now, the Liberals could have made another choice. I mentioned those choices.

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Let me deal with the premium in particular. Here's how pathetic the premium is. An individual who makes $26,000 a year is going to pay 1.2% of their taxable income, while someone making $150,000 is only going to be paying 1.5% of their income against the new tax. That's a choice you made. But I think the choice that's the clearest for me, to clearly show whose side you're on, is the choice where you give a $1-billion capital tax exemption to the banks while you stick it to modest- and middle-income Ontarians. That's your choice. You live with it, folks.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Mr Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Don Valley West.

I'm delighted to be taking part in this debate tonight. The 2004 budget, as presented, will determine the future of our province, the future of our children, the future of our young families. We will invest in health care; we will invest in education; we will invest in municipal infrastructure.

We will make sure that those who have given us the quality of life we have today, those who have been making thousands of sacrifices, are recognized in our budget: our seniors. We will increase the property tax credit for seniors with low and moderate incomes. We will restore long-term-care standards. We will add 2,000 new long-term-care staff in nursing homes, including 600 nurses. We will purchase 12,000 lift beds for long-term-care residents. We will provide home care for an additional 95,700 Ontarians by 2007-08. The Tories had frozen home care visits.

Unlike the previous government, we have consulted the people of Ontario. Yes, our government has held more than 50 consultations province-wide. The message was clear. The consensus was that the government will tackle the deficit over the course of its mandate, rather than the slash-and-burn approach of the Conservatives. This is exactly what we are doing: We are tackling this Tory deficit while investing in what Ontarians consider to be priorities for them. We could have gone the same

way as the Tories when they took over the NDP fiasco period between 1990 and 1995, but we have decided not to proceed with health cuts, education cuts and downloading.

Remember what the Tories did to the municipalities in the downloading? They transferred road services to the municipalities, and today we just can't afford to do the upkeep. They transferred 75% of the agriculture property tax to the municipalities. In the past, this was fully paid by the government. They transferred ambulance services to the municipalities. In the past, it used to be 100% paid by the province. They transferred the property tax assessment offices, which today is costing an average of $75 per household. They transferred social housing to the municipalities. Again and again, this is costing hundreds of millions of dollars to the municipalities.

In the rural sector, they transferred the responsibility for the inspection of septic sewage treatment plants that used to be handled fully by the province. When they transferred 75% of the credit that farmers used to get—and the municipalities at least were getting 100% of that property tax—the municipalities had to reduce that property tax by 75%. But we did better. We said to the farmers that we would cancel the land transfer tax as of March 28, 2003, retroactively. We will have $20 million available for nutrient management. You people failed to do anything good for the farmers.

The municipalities will benefit from $900 million for infrastructure. That was left to the opposition. Just in my own riding itself, we had a shortfall of $23 million with this downloading.

Mr Speaker, I will give my colleague a chance to take over from this point.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I'm going to share the last bit of my time with the member from Mississauga West.

I just want to be clear. I want to go on the record, as a new member in this House, as to why I'm supporting this budget and what I ran on. I was quite familiar with the Legislature as a parent activist and as a school trustee. I was here quite a bit. I got to know a lot of the members on the floor. I was up there in the gallery watching what was going on here, and I was back in my community organizing parents, working with the community to oppose the policies of the previous regime. It was a full-time job, because there was a lot to oppose, let me tell you.

I ran because we must, in this province, turn around the destruction and the devastation that's been done to our public institutions. We must do that. So when I went to the door in the 17 months that I was campaigning up to the election, I talked to people and committed to them that I would work to restore public education, to invest in public health, to expand home care, to deal with cities differently and to change the agenda around public health and public transit. That's exactly what this budget does. This budget turns around the way government deals with public infrastructure and public services in this province. That's why I ran. I ran in order to do that.

The opposition wants to say now that there are members in the caucus who aren't happy with particular parts of the budget. They're dealing in wedge politics. They're trying to divide us from each other. I can tell you that there is an enormous common ground among the members of our caucus. We are absolutely committed to turning around the direction of this province. That's what this budget will do.

Interjection.

Ms Wynne: The last thing I want to say is that there's an issue—that's a prop—on style here. When I was a parent in north Toronto, my newly elected Conservative member said that he didn't like going to public meetings because he didn't like it when people yelled at him. So we decided, as a group of parents, as part of People for Education's first Visit Your MPP Day, to visit his office, and we took signs. There were about four moms. We took signs with the names of our kids' schools, the number of kids in the schools and the services they were losing. We stood outside his door and asked for an interview with him, and he locked the door. He wouldn't open the door. He wouldn't even speak to us. His EA and his staffers were hiding behind the door because he didn't have the courage to come out and speak to us.

That's why I ran, because we are different. We are opening the doors, we are talking to people, we are looking our constituents in the eye and we're saying, "This is why I'm doing it, because we need more revenue in this province. If we don't have revenue, we can't change the damage that's been done. We can't restore this province." That's why I ran. That's why I'm supporting this budget, and I am so looking forward to the changes that we're going to make, because they are the best thing for the citizens of this province.

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Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): The budget debate allows me to introduce Peel Region Science Fair gold medallists and Canada Wide Science Fair finalists Tamryn and Tenneille Loo and David Castelino, who is here with his mother, Margaret. They are from Mississauga. We welcome them. They've just returned from the Canada Wide Science Fair in Newfoundland.

The Deputy Speaker: We welcome you. We needed that.

Questions or comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'd like to respond to a couple of things said by the member from Don Valley West and Jean-Marc Lalonde from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell.

First of all, I think the member from Don Valley West should get used to working with her federal counterpart. I think David Turnbull will make an excellent MP and I look forward to working with him. He will enjoy working with you.

I have to talk to Mr Lalonde. He smashed the previous government for what he calls downloading and what we call local services realignment. But with local services realignment, there are two points I think we should make clear. Whatever we did wrong with local services realign-

ment, or downloading, you have the power to change it. Minister Gerretsen can change it with the stroke of a pen. He can bring in legislation. So go ahead and do it. Change it back if it's so bad.

Second of all, every municipality that had any kind of downloading cost received the CRF money, and you're trying to cancel that money. That's what we're hearing across the province, from AMO and everybody else. That is a fact of life. The CRF money—the community reinvestment fund is what it's called. All the municipalities in my riding received—

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: It's hard to talk here, Mr Speaker. These people are very noisy.

The fact of the matter is, the community reinvestment fund has been paid to those communities since the beginning of the local services realignment exercise. I understand now that this government, the new government, is trying to download that and eliminate it altogether.

Mr Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity and thank you.

Mr Kormos: Earlier today I told you about 83-year-old Margaret Boychuk, who has lived for 53 years down on the Kinsgway in south Welland, in the area formerly known as Dain City. Margaret Boychuk is a widow who raised her family there and paid taxes all of her life. She's going blind now—she has macular degeneration—and the only treatment she can get is the Visudyne treatment. Mrs Boychuk isn't a wealthy woman. She's a hard-working woman and, like so many hard-working Canadians who are 83 years old, she's not a wealthy woman. She's even less prosperous than she would be otherwise because gas and electricity prices keep increasing and property taxes keep increasing, and she's going to go blind.

The problem is that she thought her Visudyne treatment was going to be covered by OHIP. Well, it isn't. The treatment she received on April 28 cost her $2,750, and she may need as many as five more treatments if she's going to recover and maintain that sight. She's legally blind now and her only chance of restoring any amount of sight is with Visudyne treatment. When she heard this budget and the delisting of services, the privatization of health services, she knew the unlikelihood of her ever having OHIP coverage so that for the final five years, maybe a decade if we're lucky, she could maintain her sight and continue to work in her garden, till the earth and grow the little bit of vegetables and flowers that she took pride in. She was hoping this government had enough of a commitment to public health care to fund her Visudyne treatment. Well, it's clear this government doesn't. This government has abandoned Mrs Boychuk. This government has abandoned other people like her. This government has abandoned people who need chiropractic services, physiotherapy services and optometrists. This government is headed down the path of privatization of health care. Shame on them.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I can't wait for October 4, 2007, to fight the next election on this budget that the Liberal government has brought down today. I have absolutely no problem going to the people and showing them the responsibility of this government versus the previous administration's.

Interjection.

Mr Sergio: You have a short memory. Who introduced copayments? The former government. Who introduced $100 for people making $16,000? The previous government. We are doing what is responsible. Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals say that, and we are doing exactly that; just some of the things that are important to the people of Ontario.

Let me tell the people across the floor, they are not telling what the people of Ontario are getting from the McGuinty government and the McGuinty budget—just some of the people. And just in case Mr Kormos forgets, let us remind him that we are looking after the people who need the most care. This is what we said, and we will do exactly that. For example, 167,000 Ontarians cannot find primary care because there are not enough doctors in Ontario. We will provide that assistance. Thirty-seven per cent won't have to pay anything with respect to health care premiums. There will be 4,000 new teachers. Why? Because they were decimated by the government. For the first time, our seniors will be enjoying some respite from any government, and they are getting it from the McGuinty Liberal government.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I really find it amazing, particularly for the member for Don Valley West to talk about a former colleague of mine, David Turnbull, who is now running in the federal election in the same area. She talks about his performance when he was in the Legislature and about her canvassing from door to door across her riding. But there's a great difference between when she was canvassing and talking to the people at the door and what David Turnbull did when he canvassed in his riding.

Ms Wynne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I was referring to a member. It was not the member to whom this member is referring.

The Deputy Speaker: Maybe we could clear that up later.

Mr Sterling: It doesn't matter which Conservative member or which Liberal member it was, there's a major difference between what happened. When our candidates went to the doors during the provincial election, we told people what we were going to do. We put forward a program, and after the election we did what we promised before the election.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): How many hospitals did you close?

Mr Sterling: Actually we built 21 hospitals while we were there in the last eight years. We did what we said we would do after the election. That's why the electorate is upset with the provincial Liberals, because you got here under false pretences. They will not forget that in this federal election and they won't forget that in the next provincial election.

I say to the other member, Mr Sergio, let's have an election now. Let's have a referendum now. Let's not

wait for the next election in October 2007; let's have it right now.

2030

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell has two minutes.

Mr Lalonde: I'd like to thank my colleague from Don Valley West, and also my colleague from York West. But for the other three, I would highly recommend that they take a French copy so they will clearly understand what the contents of this budget are, because we have the best budget for seniors that we've had in many decades. Also, I think if those three members would take the time and go to the office of my Don Valley West colleague, she would be in a real position to teach them how to read the budget properly. Then they would probably understand properly.

The member for Simcoe North referred to how we haven't done much for the people of Ontario. Let me tell you, they are the ones who cancelled the 100% part of public health that the government of Ontario was paying toward the municipalities. You transferred 50% of that responsibility. We did better than that. We said we will charge only 25% instead of 50%, but it used to be fully paid by the provincial government.

What we are debating today is a budget that was left to us with a large deficit. When we took over, we never expected we would be facing what we are facing today: a deficit of over $5.6 billion, plus an accumulated debt of $139 billion.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish we'd all just quiet down a little. I can't hear the noise from Tampa Bay. Further debate?

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): It's a pleasure to rise today to speak on the budget motion. I can't believe that we have some similar constituents. I can't believe that the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell has the same seniors, because I haven't been hearing that they're happy. I'm hearing that they're more like those from Niagara Centre, whose member was telling a story about a senior who is not going to be able to stay in her home any more. The people in my riding are angry, especially about the delisting of chiropractics, physiotherapy and optometry services and the new health care premium.

Mr O'Toole: The tax. It's a health tax, not a premium. It's a tax. This "premium" language is baloney.

Ms Scott: It's a tax. It's another blow to the seniors, Jean-Marc. I just can't believe that the seniors are happy. They've already increased the rate of hydro and taken the senior's tax credit away. These are things that you've done in your budget.

People in small rural communities struggle to make ends meet. They don't have the family doctors and access to services that people in the urban areas take for granted. I'm concerned to read in the newspaper your government's plans surrounding the optometry services. Let's talk about that for a minute. They're going to need a physician's referral. Most of the people in my area, a large amount of them, don't have access to family doctors. That's a little bit of an urban bias when you say, "It's OK, they can go to their doctor and get a prescription to visit the optometrist." Maybe the Minister of Health needs to visit some more underserviced areas in the province to really understand the hardship that's going on.

I've received calls and letters from constituents angry at the budget announcement of increased fees and the delisting of services, like I said before. And they should be angry. Like the third party has said, the increased burden on low-income and middle-income earners has a real impact on the services that are delivered to them. This is not good health care. These are preventive measures taken away. It will cost more for health care at the end of day. This is not good planning. Have they thought out the long-term effects this will have on the health care system, the money we'll have to spend on it?

Over the last 10 years when the previous government was in, we reduced the debt by $5 billion, but over the next few years, you're looking at increasing the debt up to $12 billion. The budget will raise an additional $9.7 billion in taxes in one form or another, whether they're called user fees, taxes or the cancellation of the previous tax credits. We're going to see $1.6 billion in this fiscal year raised in a new health care tax and that will net the government $2 billion in succeeding fiscal years. We're going to see a $1.1-billion increase in personal income tax. There's already that Enron-style game going on with that $3.9-billion hydro tax that will be collected over the next 20 years, but it's all in this fiscal year's books. We're going to see a $200-million increase in tobacco taxes on wine, spirits and beer.

"No, I will not raise your taxes." There are already 50 tax increases in this budget. Let's also remember the $9.7 billion on top of the $4.3 billion that was introduced by the government on January 1 this year. Families, small businesses and farmers can only absorb so much in the way of taxation before they start to make decisions that are going to negatively affect all of us and the economy of our towns and our cities.

Because of this increase in taxation levels, families will put off buying new homes. This will create job losses in the construction industry. They'll be putting off buying new cars. What does this mean for the people in my communities who make their living selling cars? I stopped into a car dealership. They've sold two cars since the budget was announced. It's a new car dealership. He's looking at laying off people. This budget is not going to make life better for Ontarians. He's going to be out of work and out of business.

I'm going to tell you about a constituent of mine, Brian Wood. His life's going to be a lot more difficult. He lives in St Paul's House, which is a group home for disabled adults. He's 90% blind, and the delisting of ophthalmology services and physiotherapy services is going to be a financial hardship on him.

There are countless other individual stories of hardship that I can relate to. I have to think that every member is getting these phone calls.

Interjections.

Ms Scott: Optometrists. I'm sorry. No problem.

Interjection: Let her talk.

Mr O'Toole: They're not listening to you.

Ms Scott: That's okay. That's all right. I hope that they think, before they stand in their places and vote on this budget, about the disruptive impact it's going to have on all their constituents.

I want to address the issue of the new health tax—because it is a tax, and you're trying to portray it as a premium. But it's going to be taken off the people's paycheques as part of their personal income tax payments. It's not a separate line that shows their health premium deductions. It's going to be simply lumped in as part of their income tax deductions. The premiums themselves, which are supposed to be dedicated to providing enhanced health care services, are going to be lumped in to the general revenues of the province. So it remains to be seen whether they're going to be used for health care at all. We'll all be waiting to see that.

As the members of the third party have taken great pains to point out to the government members opposite, the health care premium's going to hit working families the hardest. An individual making $26,000 a year will have to pay 1.2% of their taxable income, while someone with an income of $45,000 will have to pay 1% of their income, while people making large salaries will have to pay a much smaller portion of their income.

Interjection: Exactly.

Ms Scott: Absolutely. Many of the people in my riding earn modest incomes. In Haliburton county alone, the average household income is $44,991. That is the lowest of almost every other part of the province. It's lower than the Premier's part of the province. Do you want to know what the average income is in Ottawa-Carleton? It's $80,526. In York region, the Minister of Finance's riding, the average household income is $98,000. It's much harder for the people in my riding to absorb these service cuts and tax increases than it will be for the people in the Premier's riding or the Minister of Finance's riding, who make that average income.

No matter how many times and how you try to spin this budget, the hard-working families who believed your promises and voted for you are the ones who are paying the price. They did not know that the promises in the heat of an election campaign by the Liberals are not to be trusted. They believed you when you said you would not raise their taxes. They believed you when you signed the taxpayers' protection pledge. They didn't expect that your promises would amount to a tax grab aimed directly at them and their families.

Many of the people in my riding are farmers and have already been forced to deal with the BSE crisis. It's had serious impact on their ability to make a living, and many of them are being forced to make sacrifices just to remain farming. In the past few months, they've had to pay increased amounts for hydro service, and this budget does nothing to make their lives any easier. The only agriculture announcements in the budget were re-announcements of items that the government earlier pledged money to. If you look more closely—

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): There's $120 million.

Ms Scott: I'm going to get to that, Steve. You'll notice that the overall operating dollars for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food was reduced to $128 million. That's a 20% reduction. The nutrient management plan—$20 million doesn't translate into money flowing this year.

So on behalf of the farmers in my riding, I'm moving adjournment of debate of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms Scott has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

2040

Ms Scott: No; debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me? No. Let's clear it: Was it debate? Ms Scott has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it. Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2040 to 2110.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms Scott has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, please stand and remain standing. Take your seats, please.

All those opposed will please stand.

Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 8; the nays are 27.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost. The member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock has the floor.

Ms Scott: Getting back to the budget of broken promises and how it affects the people in my riding, the day after the budget, there was actually an elderly lady who phoned into the office, crying. She didn't think she'd be able to stay in her own house because of the effects the budget would have on her. It's a sad thing to happen.

Going through the streets of Lindsay, the barber was so angry, he almost shaved someone's head too close. He was. It is a very true story. It's Spencer's barbershop on Main Street in Lindsay. It's where Leslie Frost used to go to get the pulse of Ontario, what was happening. There was anger everywhere. People were coming out and saying, "They broke their promises. They didn't do what they said they were going to do. No." How can they stay in their own homes? Increases in taxes 50 times—broken promises. They said, "But Dalton McGuinty signed the taxpayers' pledge."

My colleague Frank Klees introduced a bill earlier this week entitled the Taxpayer Protection Affirmation Act, 2004, Bill 85. I encourage all members in the House to support this bill, because I think it's important. Everyone agreed to protect the rights of the taxpayers of Ontario. They should be able to expect fiscal prudence and accountability to them. That's what the Premier promised

during the election. He said, "We're not going to raise your taxes." So he should do what he said in the election. He said he'd have a referendum before he'd raise taxes, and that's what the people want.

Some 230 promises were made in the last election, yet this budget has charted a new course and we'll see tax increases more than 20 times over the next year, and the provincial debt is going to rise by $2 billion by 2007. Please, listen to the people of Ontario and make changes in the budget that's coming.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm very pleased to be able to respond to the comments by the member from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock. I need to say that it's really quite interesting, as someone fairly new to this chamber, to hear members of the official opposition bringing forward arguments that I actually used as a New Democrat during my election campaign not too long ago. In fact, all the comments that were raised by the member are exactly the kinds of comments I was raising with the residents of Hamilton East even prior to the budget being tabled. I can tell you, at that time, prior to this budget, people were concerned about the broken promises of this government.

It's not surprising, then, to me that the budget didn't come down until five days after we had the by-election in Hamilton East, which really speaks to a number of issues, including the arrogance of this government to not allow the people of Hamilton East to have a voice or a vote on the budget. And you know why. They couldn't have that voice or vote because this government was afraid to put the budget to the people. This government was afraid to have the people vote on this budget. That is why this budget was tabled five days after the by-election took place.

All I can say is that the positive thing, I guess, from the perspective of the government, is that they didn't have a chance to do that. Therefore, 63% of the vote was achieved as opposed to probably 95%, had the budget been tabled prior to the by-election date.

It's because of the broken promises that have been not only ongoing since the day this party took government, but are also reflected in that budget. In fact, not even broken promises, but the weak leadership and the inability of this government to speak to the actual working people of this province was so clear. It's frightening, from my perspective, to see the regressive nature of this budget. I really want to say that the member who spoke to this prior to me was right on the money: It's about broken promises, weak leadership and lack of ability to speak to the people.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I was delighted to listen very carefully to the member from Victoria-Haliburton-Brock. Just to set the record straight, I remember not too long ago the former mayor of Lindsay, Ontario, my good friend Art Truax, coming into my office and saying, "You know, Jeff, if you're successful on October 2, when are you going to start uploading some of the costs that were downloaded to us by our good friend Al Leach, when he brought in his famous omnibus bill a few months after the Tories were elected in 1995?" I remember Mr Truax telling me, "In the good old days, public health care used to be funded on an 80-20 basis; 80% by the provincial government, 20% by the municipality."

One of the things that's going to occur in this budget is that we're finally starting the uploading process in this province, to give a better balance between municipalities and the provincial government and to allow municipalities to finally put their dollars where they see their priorities, not the priorities that were established by that downloading exercise by the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Al Leach.

The other thing that's interesting—and I like my friend the member from Victoria-Haliburton-Brock. She invoked the memory of former Premier, Les Frost. Well, I would recommend that the member read his biography that was written by Roger Graham, a professor from Queen's University. What Mr Frost thought, it was said, was that the obligation of the province was to look after people who were disadvantaged and disabled. That government slashed welfare rates by 21% and put people out in the streets. The streets of Peterborough, that's where the people were. Now they pretend to be Mother Teresa over there. That act wears thin, because the people of Ontario know their record.

Mr Dunlop: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just wanted to point out that the member from Victoria-Haliburton-Brock is a nurse. She may not be Mother Teresa, but she has a very caring place in her heart for the general public. She's worked at the hospital in Lindsay and all of those areas. I think it's important that we acknowledge that and that everyone knows she is a caring nurse.

The Deputy Speaker: The point of order should be that she's from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, not Victoria-Haliburton-Brock.

Mr Dunlop: I'll correct myself on that. I apologize for that.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Durham has two minutes.

Mr O'Toole: In the interests of saving time, I want to acknowledge the valid contribution by the member from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock. As our party whip has said, she is a professional nurse. I can tell you, she speaks with knowledge and passion on a topic that is the defeat of this government. What she tried to bring to the debate was something that even members of their own caucus have said. In fact, their own party whip, Dave Levac, was quoted in the Brantford Expositor on May 29, after the budget. He said, "'The irony is that I spoke to them just after returning from my regular appointments,' Levac chuckled...." What he said here is, "The Liberal whip told chiropractors he felt their pain, and suggested that McGuinty should revisit the decision to slash these services." So there's their whip.

We have another minister here tonight, Maria Bountrogianni from Hamilton Mountain. What did she say? "I know how disappointed they are. They're defeated. I can

see their tail between their legs. You can see it. It's the drooping shoulders. It's the symbolism of it all." She said she "will be fighting to lower the premiums."

Minister, I say to you in all reason—

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: No, it's actually from the Hamilton Spectator of May 26, 2004.

As a minister who was at the cabinet table that decided to delist services—optometry, chiropractic, physiotherapy—that are going to affect the most vulnerable in our society, the frail elderly who are going to be denied services—it's the thin edge-of-the-wedge. step of a deliberate scheme, a plan, to delist services.

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On top of that, they're imposing a fine, or a tax, if you will—a premium. Laurie Scott, the member from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, is the only one who has brought the passion and reason right down to the Ross Memorial Hospital, where she practised as a nurse. She cares about health, and it's clear that Dalton McGuinty doesn't. The people of Ontario—

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. Questions and comments?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I want to commend the member from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock for her comments. It's been said a couple of times tonight that she brings a particular perspective to this debate as a person who is a practitioner in the health care system, and I think that's important to note.

There's an issue called leadership. The Liberals, in this particular debate, are trying to tell us it takes leadership; it takes leadership for them to whack people with a great big tax increase, and that's a question of leadership. But let's put this into perspective. Before the election, Dalton McGuinty went out and signed a pledge with the taxpayers' federation. In that pledge, he said, "We are not going to raise taxes"; signed, Dalton McGuinty.

Mr O'Toole: You can't believe them.

Mr Bisson: Let me finish. I want to show you the leadership that this takes. On the one hand we have this leadership that signed the taxpayers' protection pledge. Then he went out to another group of people and said, "I'll promise you everything. You want health care? I'll give you health care. You want something? I'll give you something. I'll promise absolutely everything." Then they get elected and spin the wheel and they go, "Which promise are we going to break?" because they've got to break one.

Mr O'Toole: How about all of them?

Mr Bisson: That's my point, where I'm going. It's a question of which type of promise they're going to break. On the one hand they said, "We're not going to raise taxes"; on the other hand they said, "We're going to promise the world." They spun the wheel and it landed on everything. That's the thing that's really interesting about this.

They say leadership. They didn't pick one side of the equation or the other; they picked both at the same time. They're not delivering on the most fundamental of promises that they made to people when it comes to services, and then they break the promise they made to taxpayers that they wouldn't raise taxes. I say leadership; that takes chutzpah. That's not leadership; that's Liberals doing what they always do, and that is saying one thing to voters during the period of an election and doing quite differently when they get elected.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for, um, Haliburton-Victoria-Brock has two minutes to reply.

Ms Scott: I just want to warn the people in the Legislature that the riding name will be changing again soon, so don't get too used to saying it in the proper order.

Hon Mr Caplan: What's the new name?

Ms Scott: Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. That's going to be the new name.

Hon Mr Caplan: That's a little shorter.

Ms Scott: Yes; a little shorter for everyone.

I want to thank the member for Hamilton East, the new member, and welcome her to the Legislature. She's certainly a welcome addition. I appreciate your being here. She certainly hit on the right topic of broken promises, because that is the theme of what's happened in this budget.

The member from Peterborough mentioned Leslie Frost, and I did mention that barbershop intentionally, because Leslie Frost would always go there to get the pulse of Ontario. That is a very true story I told you about the anger in the barbershop toward this budget. The one million jobs created by the previous government is something to be proud of, not to be ashamed of, definitely.

To the member for Durham and the point of order from the member for Simcoe North, back on health care: As a practitioner, I can't reinforce enough the fact that I appreciate what the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has done today for full-time nurses. We certainly need more full-time nurses. They are the front line. We're going to be watching closely, though, because I do not want that to be another broken promise. I want 8,000 more nurses, so I'm going to watch closely for those 8,000 nurses.

I'd like to thank the member from Timmins-James Bay for his comments. It does take leadership to make changes in government. With respect, I know we've talked a lot about health care and the delisting of services, but those are very passionate things; we need to make sure people have access to care. Those things are going to affect people greatly.

Some other impacts of the 2004 Liberal budget: the $1.6-billion personal income tax hike for the health care premiums—I hope that means better health care service; and the $3.9-billion electricity rate hike, increases in taxes, beer, wine and tobacco—are you going to make me stop? Delisting of—

The Deputy Speaker: I think the member's time has expired.

It being 9:30 of the clock, this House is adjourned until Monday, June 7, at 1:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 2125.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 7 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 7 juin 2004

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I rise today to bring attention to the recent decision, hidden on page 96 of the budget, to change the definition of "northern Ontario" to exclude the district of Muskoka. I find it surprising that there was no mention of this in the budget speech, no consultation with any of the municipalities beforehand and no justification. Thousands from my beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka have signed petitions expressing their anger. This decision will have a massive impact on their lives.

Being excluded from the north will mean cutting the northern medical specialist and family physician incentive program, the health recruitment tour travel subsidy and the locum program for specialists. For the town of Bala, which has been trying to recruit a physician for two years, this will mean no longer being eligible for incentive grants to help them attract a doctor to their community. Meanwhile, the South Muskoka Memorial Hospital estimates that the loss of the northern Ontario heritage fund grants will cost them between $500,000 to $600,000 a year. Algonquin Health Services in Huntsville will also see substantial increases in costs and increased difficulty in recruiting doctors. All this comes from a government that says they believe in improving access to health care.

In Muskoka, the average family income is well below that of Sudbury. It also has a growing aging population, which naturally increases the stress on the local health system.

This is partisan and mean-spirited. I urge the government to immediately rethink this decision.

ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Sixty years ago, a heroic band of brothers landed on Juno Beach to join the invasion of Normandy. These Canadians, most still in their teens, were conveyers of hope and ambassadors of freedom. They helped set the table for an end of tyranny and oppression in Europe.

Yesterday, a band of a different sort walked on Juno Beach. That band was the Burlington Teen Tour Band, Canadian ambassadors extraordinaire. Led by their conductor, Sir William Hughes—"Sir Bill," as he is affectionately known—the band participated in the Juno Beach ceremony in Normandy, France, commemorating the 60th anniversary of D-Day and the battle of Normandy.

The teen tour band was founded in 1947, and has represented Canada in ceremonies around the world. Known as Canada's musical ambassadors, the band has won countless awards. The sons of two of my constituency staff, namely Jim Curtis and Nick Quaglia, were with the band. Together with their talented colleagues, they played an important role in this historic commemoration.

Sixty years to the day, we once again have Canadian youth ambassadors making us proud on the shores of Normandy. Judging from the e-mails sent back home, it was an important learning experience that these young men and women will never forget.

I know members of this democratically elected Legislative Assembly will want to join me in thanking the incredible young men and women of the Burlington Teen Tour Band for representing us at the official ceremony in Normandy. I'm proud of each and every one of these young people. They are indeed a national treasure.

RONALD REAGAN

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): "Twenty summers ago, another American president came to Normandy to pay tribute to the men of D-Day." These were the words of President George W. Bush as he paid tribute to Ronald Reagan during ceremonies in France marking the 60th anniversary of D-Day.

Known as the Great Communicator, former President Reagan, who died over the weekend, is remembered for his sense of humour and his ability to fight battles without creating enemies. He will also be remembered for his deep-rooted conservatism that revolutionized America in the 1980s and ushered in the end of the Cold War, as well as for his sunny optimism and fierce opposition to taxes, big government and communism.

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher says "Ronald Reagan had a higher claim than any other leader to have won the Cold War for liberty, and he did it without a shot being fired." Reagan's long-time nemesis, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, had this to say:

"He has already entered history as a man who was instrumental in bringing about the end of the Cold War."

Ronald Reagan will be remembered as a great American. His funeral will be held this coming Friday. Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney will be a pallbearer.

OHIP OFFICE

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I have a message for the citizens of Toronto. I want to alert them to a petition that I'm doing so that if they're interested in it, they can sign on to it. It would read something more or less to this effect:

"Yes, Rosario Marchese, I agree with you that the taxpayers in downtown Toronto deserve ready access to an OHIP office.

"Whereas more than 800,000 people live in the downtown core," George;

"Whereas the only OHIP offices in the entire GTA that service non-homeless clients are at 47 Sheppard Avenue East; 4400 Dufferin Street; 2063 Lawrence Avenue East; or 3300 Bloor Street West; and

"Whereas OHIP is an essential service to all the people of this province; and

"Whereas taking more than one day off work to stand in long lineups at OHIP offices located in distant parts of the city is detrimental to a worker's productivity, and the economy as a whole;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To immediately locate a suitable building for an OHIP office in the downtown core, and have the office ready to receive clients by the end of 2004."

I say to the citizens of Toronto that we deserve an office that serves our needs. It is an essential service. The Ministry of Health has an obligation to ensure that the service is provided. If you feel that we need an OHIP office downtown, please call my community office at 603-9664 or, better still, tell the Minister of Health, George Smitherman, that we need an office in downtown Toronto.

1340

RELAY FOR LIFE

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): This past weekend, a wonderful event took place in Maxville, in the beautiful riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, in which I was extremely proud to participate, along with Don Boudria, our federal member of Parliament. The Canadian Cancer Society held its fourth annual Relay for Life, a fundraising event for cancer research. The walk, joined by 1,800 participants, took place from 7 pm Friday evening until 7 am Saturday morning. This year, there were also 315 survivors of cancer who participated in this significant event.

Furthermore, I am proud to share with my colleagues that participants in this year's Maxville walk raised $443,000. What a success. The small village of Alfred raised over $15,000, a great accomplishment. Since its beginning four years ago, the Relay for Life has raised over $1.5 million for cancer research.

In light of our recent budget, I would like to remind my colleagues that reducing wait times for cancer treatment is a key part of our government's reform of the Ontario health care system. To participate in this celebration of survival and tribute to the lives of loved ones who have been touched by cancer was truly rewarding.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Mr Speaker, the results are in. In a recent SES survey in Osprey Media this past weekend, 9% of those surveyed supported what Dalton McGuinty is doing here in the province of Ontario—9%—a pretty abysmal rating after only seven months in office. I think Brian Mulroney, the one those across the floor love to hate, even at his lowest, when he was leaving office, had a 15% rating. I'll ask my colleagues in the NDP, but I don't think Bob Rae ever came anywhere close to 9%.

Let's put it into further perspective. According to the FarShores Para News in October 2001, more people believe in aliens than think Dalton McGuinty is doing a good job. There's some solace, though: 6.3%, close to McGuinty's rating, said they had seen a ghost, so you're beating the ghost numbers. And according to the Comedy Network/Ipsos-Reid poll of 2001, 10% of Canadians think the moon landing was faked. I'm not sure about the Elvis rating; that's a tough one to get a judgment on. But that puts into perspective people's opinions of Dalton McGuinty and his leadership, with good reason: 32 major broken promises, tax hikes and multi-year deficits that make Bob Rae look like a fiscal conservative, and a delisting of important health care services.

The members across the floor have a chance to stand up tomorrow, Tuesday, and send a message to their boss and to those behind him by supporting Mrs Witmer's resolution to support health care services.

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): To the great relief of the thousands of teachers in Ontario, the Ministry of Education has announced plans to eliminate the PLP program. Most people outside the education world would shake their heads and ask themselves, "What's PLP?" I ask them to imagine that in order to continue in their job or profession they were required to remain on perpetual probation. That's what PLP was.

The truly silly thing about PLP is that it did not recognize any prior professional development. For example, if you had a master's degree in a specific field, PLP required that you continue to take courses that you had either long ago or just recently mastered. As another example, marking EQAO tests counted as a recertifica-

tion credit. Surely this job cannot be considered professional development.

There is no requirement like PLP among other professional bodies such as doctors, lawyers or accountants. And of course, for teachers in any private school there is no requirement to recertify or, often, to certify in the first place.

PLP was badly thought out from its very inception. As bad policy, it was patched and modified. No fixing can ever make it work. It needs to be scrapped, and it will be scrapped.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): On behalf of my constituents of Mississauga East, I am here to praise our government's decision to commit $19.9 million in our budget toward the protection of women and children from domestic violence. Our continued dedication to supporting those who are in need is a defining line between our government and the previous government. This pledge was further supported by an announcement last week by the Attorney General when he declared that $1.6 million from the victim's justice fund be distributed to 18 community-based agencies across our great province.

One of those organizations receiving funding was Catholic Family Services of Peel-Dufferin. With our government's commitment of $39,140 to Catholic Family Services, they will be able to provide more spaces in their 12-step treatment process for victims of sexual violence and their children. As much as their title would suggest that it is a Catholic entity, they have opened their arms to the community at large, and their dedication to help anyone in need of their support should be applauded.

We must also note that domestic violence is sometimes overlooked or mistakenly assessed by those in a position to help. In Mr Sorbara's budget, he swore we would increase funding for the training of police officers, crown attorneys and others working in the justice system to better assess risk in abusive situations. As much as campaigning to end domestic violence is a useful tool, guiding those in a position to help will ultimately aid those who have been subject to the crime.

Again, I'd like to thank our government on behalf of all those in Mississauga East who will see a positive effect from the funding directed to Catholic Family Services of Peel-Dufferin.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I just want to comment on an open house that I had at my constituency office on Friday. I want to thank all the constituents who came to visit me. Of course, I had a very good opportunity to discuss with them many of the changes that have taken place in the government in the province.

It was interesting, because we talked quite a bit about the budget, as you can well imagine. Many of my constituents said to me, "I can't believe how quickly the people of Ontario have forgotten what an incredible state of disrepair this province was left in in September and the uncertainty that existed surrounding our health care services." They couldn't understand how people forgot that they couldn't rely on an ambulance arriving when they called one, or that when they got to the emergency room they might be turned away. They couldn't rely on how quickly they might get the service they needed from their doctor—if the doctor said, "You need this treatment," how long they might have to wait for that. My constituents said to me, "I can't believe how quickly people have forgotten."

What we have done in our budget is ensured that hospital funding is spent on improving patient care. We're providing our clinics with more resources to perform an additional 9,000 cataract surgeries. We're delivering 2,300 more hip and knee total joint replacements annually. We're performing 425 more organ transplants a year. Ontarians wanted shorter waiting times, and that's what we're going to give them. They wanted more comprehensive home care, and we're delivering on that, and many other issues in health.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate CHTV on their 50th anniversary. It was 50 years ago tonight that CHTV went on air and into our homes for the first time. Throughout its 50-year history, CH television has pioneered many television firsts—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. That wasn't a point of order. It would have been better done as a minister's statement, I would say.

REQUEST TO INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a request by the member for Leeds-Grenville to the Honourable Coulter A. Osborne, Integrity Commissioner, for an opinion pursuant to subsection 30(1) of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the Honourable Gregory Sorbara, Minister of Finance, in his responsibility for the budget and budget secrecy, has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

1350

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery the public accounts committee for the National Assembly of Kenya. Please join me in welcoming our guests.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended: Bill 49, An Act to prevent the disposal of waste at the Adams Mine site and to amend the Environmental Protection Act in respect of the disposal of waste in lakes / Loi visant à empêcher l'élimination de déchets à la mine Adams et à modifier la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement en ce qui concerne l'élimination de déchets dans des lacs.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

REPRESENTATION AMENDMENT ACT (NORTHERN ONTARIO), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA REPRÉSENTATION ÉLECTORALE (NORD DE L'ONTARIO)

Mr Bisson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to amend the Representation Act, 1996 respecting the number of electoral districts in Northern Ontario / Projet de loi 89, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur la représentation électorale en ce qui concerne le nombre de circonscriptions électorales du Nord de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): You would know that the government, in the last election and, since then, during the throne speech, promised that they would be introducing legislation in this House to make sure that northern Ontario, through the new redistribution, does not lose the number of seats it currently has. As you know, the federal government, through its redistribution, has diminished by one the number of seats in northern Ontario, and this particular legislation deals with that fact so that we're able to maintain the seats we have now.

C'est pour assurer que, à la fin de la journée, le gouvernement garde ses engagements qu'il a faits envers sa promesse, durant l'élection et durant le discours du trône, qui dit qu'on ne va pas réduire le nombre de sièges dans le nord de l'Ontario dans les années à venir. Le gouvernement avait promis ça. Puis je vais être très « supportive » du gouvernement en l'aidant à garder cette promesse. C'est pour ça que j'ai introduit ce projet de loi. Je regarde à ce point-ci pour avoir le consentement unanime pour passer à la deuxième lecture.

PROTECTION OF MINORS FROM SEXUALLY EXPLICIT GOODS AND SERVICES ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LA PROTECTION DES MINEURS CONTRE LES BIENS ET SERVICES SEXUELLEMENT EXPLICITES

Mr O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 90, An Act to protect minors from exposure to sexually explicit goods and services / Projet de loi 90, Loi visant à protéger les mineurs contre les biens et services sexuellement explicites.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm reintroducing this bill on behalf of Mr Wood, who was a former member from, I believe, London South. The bill prohibits a person from selling, offering to sell or distributing sexually explicit goods or services specifically to minors. All of us in the House, I'm sure, would like to protect minors from unnecessary exposure to sexually explicit material. I ask for unanimous support for this bill when it comes to the House for second and third reading.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Très clairement, quand j'ai introduit le projet de loi il y a une couple de minutes, j'avais demandé le consentement unanime.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): You asked for unanimous consent in your bill?

M. Bisson: J'ai demandé la deuxième et la troisième lecture et j'ai demandé le consentement unanime. Ce n'est pas compliqué.

The Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay asked for unanimous consent for his bill in second and third reading. Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

DENTAL HYGIENE AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRES

Mrs Cansfield moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 91, An Act to amend the Dental Hygiene Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 91, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les hygiénistes dentaires.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): Currently under subsection 5(1) of the Dental Hygiene Act, there is a prohibition against dental hygienists from carrying out the authorized acts of scaling teeth, actually cleaning teeth, including procedures around the same

issue unless they are ordered by a member of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario. The purpose of this bill is to permit dental hygienists to perform these procedures without such an order.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have consent? We do.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(ii), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 12 midnight on Monday, June 7, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1359 to 1404.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Peters, Steve
Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Barrett, Toby	Hudak, Tim	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Jeffrey, Linda	Racco, Mario G.
Bentley, Christopher	Kennedy, Gerard	Ramsay, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Rinaldi, Lou
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Runciman, Robert W.
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Broten, Laurel C.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Michael A.	Leal, Jeff	Scott, Laurie
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Tascona, Joseph N.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Di Cocco, Caroline	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Miller, Norm	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Wilson, Jim
Duncan, Dwight	Mitchell, Carol	Witmer, Elizabeth
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Fonseca, Peter	O'Toole, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gerretsen, John	Orazietti, David	Zimmer, David
Gravelle, Michael	Parsons, Ernie	

The Speaker: All those against, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Martel, Shelley
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Hampton, Howard	Marchese, Rosario	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 74; the nays are 8.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: It would seem that I owe the government House leader a bit of an apology. The memo actually had come to my desk and unfortunately was underneath all my other documents.

Interjection: Resign.

Mr Bisson: Resign where, guys?

I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business. I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Mr Klees and Mr Runciman exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr Runciman assumes ballot item number 33 and Mr Klees assumes ballot item number 30.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

DEFERRED VOTES

COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF MEDICARE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L'ENGAGEMENT D'ASSURER L'AVENIR DE L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act / Projet de loi 8, Loi créant le Conseil ontarien de la qualité des services de santé, édictant une nouvelle loi relative à l'accessibilité aux services de santé et abrogeant la Loi sur l'accessibilité aux services de santé, prévoyant l'imputabilité du secteur des services de santé et modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1408 to 1413.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Parsons, Ernie
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Peters, Steve
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kennedy, Gerard	Racco, Mario G.
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Sorbara, Greg
Delaney, Bob	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Di Cocco, Caroline	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Duncan, Dwight	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Zimmer, David
Fonseca, Peter	Orazietti, David	

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.
Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Scott, Laurie
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Tascona, Joseph N.
Dunlop, Garfield	Martel, Shelley	Wilson, Jim
Hampton, Howard	Martiniuk, Gerry	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	
Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 62; the nays are 22.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill be now passed and entitled as in the motion.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. On May 31, it was reported by Caroline Mallan that you gave the following quote, and I would expect that you could confirm that you said this: "I gave the Prime Minister a heads up, no doubt about it, with respect to the challenge that the budget would present and the fact that it would contain a health care premium." Can you confirm for us that you did say those words?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Yes, I did.

Mr Klees: Given the Premier's confirmation of those words, we do have a problem, and the problem is this: Today the Canadian Press reports that Prime Minister Martin, in an interview with a Thunder Bay TV station, said that he was caught off guard by Ontario's budget. He went on to say that Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty gave him no indication there would be tax hikes, other than a comment that the budget would be a tough one. Between the two of you, the Premier of Ontario or the Prime Minister of Canada, who is lying?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member from Oak Ridges, I would ask you to withdraw that unparliamentary word.

Mr Klees: I withdraw that. I will rephrase the question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm sure the member opposite and the leader of the third party would be anxious to learn that I'm told that the media report the member is quoting from does not accurately reflect the Prime Minister's comments. The Prime Minister's staff—

Interjections.

Hon Mr McGuinty: —I know that the member will be genuinely interested in this—are presently in contact with the reporter to get the story corrected and ensure the report is accurate.

1420

Mr Klees: We will look forward to seeing the spin on this one, because the Prime Minister, I suggest, is caught in a Catch-22: Either he maintains his own integrity or he tries to cover up for someone who hasn't kept a promise and, quite frankly, who only 9% of people in this province now believe.

I'd like to remind the Premier that no other Premier—in fact, no other leader—in the history of this country has lost the confidence of the people so quickly. Some 100,000 people have signed the CTF's petition demanding a referendum. I have in my office literally thousands of names of people who have signed a petition demanding a referendum, and that this Premier, who had no mandate to increase taxes for the people of Ontario, at least keep the law of this province and allow the people of Ontario to have their say so that they can let him know how they feel about this tax increase. Will the Premier—

The Speaker: Thank you. Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to remind the member again that we engaged Ontarians in the most extensive pre-budget consultation exercise ever. I will also remind the member that when he voted to break the Taxpayer Protection Act, he did not first obtain the consent of the people of Ontario by means of a referendum. So he has no standing, moral or otherwise, to preach to us when it comes to talking about what's going to happen with respect to the Taxpayer Protection Act.

We've made some difficult decisions and what we intend to do, as the member well knows, is reduce waiting times in health care and improve student achievement when it comes to public education.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is also to the Premier. Premier, when you decided to break your promise to the people of Ontario and introduce the punishing health tax, were you aware that many school boards in this province had clauses in

their contracts with staff that would require the boards to pay for this new health care tax?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'll tell you what I remain painfully aware of, and that is that when it comes to quarterly financial updates which are released by the Ministry of Finance, there was one released by the previous government on August 12, 2003, and that was three weeks before the very election date. It's important to understand that it was released subsequent to SARS, subsequent to the blackout and subsequent to the federal budget. Our party and the people of Ontario looked at this document released by the then government, which specifically said that the budget was balanced.

What we intend to do is ensure that kind of misinformation will never again be released to the people of Ontario by introducing, as we have, the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act to make sure that cannot be perpetrated on the people of Ontario again.

Mrs Witmer: I would have to agree with John Weatherup's comments today when he said, "I don't think the government knew what it was doing," in reference to the introduction of the new health care tax.

My question was pretty simple, Premier. When you decided to break your promise to the people of Ontario and introduce the punishing health tax, were you aware that many school boards throughout the province had clauses in their contracts with staff that would require the board to pay for the health care tax, yes or no?

Hon Mr McGuinty: What we were aware of was that because of the absolutely untenable financial position the previous government had left the people of Ontario in, we were going to have to make difficult decisions. We were very, very much aware of that.

We also knew we weren't going to run away from this particular challenge. So we've called upon the people of Ontario to make an investment in their health care system, which was not an easy thing to do, but we maintain it was an absolutely essential request for us to make to the people of Ontario. What we intend to do, of course, with that premium is to invest generously in our health care system.

Our Minister of Health, who is now not with us because he's not a well man—he has departed from this Legislature because he's been working too hard. He has been working exceptionally hard to ensure that we get wait times down when it comes to cardiac care, cancer care, cataracts and hip replacements. Those are the objectives that we have set for ourselves when it comes to the use of these precious health care premium dollars.

Mrs Witmer: This is embarrassing. No wonder the approval rating is only at 9%. It's obvious that John Weatherup was right: This Premier didn't know what he was doing when he introduced the health tax.

I would ask the Premier for the third time: Did you know, when you broke your promise to the people of Ontario and introduced the punishing health tax, that many school boards throughout the province had clauses in their contracts with staff that would require the board to pay for the health care tax? Yes or no?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me address the matter very specifically. These premiums are different from previous premiums introduced by previous governments of Ontario because they are tied to income, meaning they're going to be collected under the Income Tax Act and deducted from paycheques accordingly.

TAXATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Last week, the finance minister accused New Democrats of distorting the truth about your unfair budget. If anyone is guilty of distorting the truth, it is you and your finance minister, who promised working families in Ontario that you wouldn't increase their taxes, and now you've done just that.

Here are the facts once again. Under your budget, a single-parent mom with an income of $30,000 a year will be forced to pay a shocking 24% increase in her income taxes, while the income tax of an individual who has an income of $200,000 a year will only increase by 3%. Meanwhile, your budget will give those poor banks and those impoverished insurance companies a $1-billion tax cut.

Premier, I call it a gross distortion of fairness and justice to attack the middle-class families of Ontario while you give your friends, the banks and insurance companies, a $1-billion tax cut. What do you call it?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): To the Minister of Finance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): The accusations that I made last week continue to stand. Let me tell my friend the leader of the New Democratic Party what the actual facts of the circumstances are in this province. We have the most progressive and lowest tax rates for people making anywhere from $10,000 to $55,000 in this province, and with the Ontario health care premium, our tax rates continue to be the most progressive.

But I want to tell him one more thing. In his example, he uses the figure of 24%. Under the example that he uses, the average tax rate of that individual rises from—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Member from Durham, I would like to hear the Minister of Finance. Minister?

Hon Mr Sorbara: In the example that my friend uses, the average tax rate for a single mother earning $30,000 will be about 9.9%. By comparison—and I know you want me to hurry—an individual making $200,000 in this province pays an average tax rate of about 44%. I consider that to be a very progressive system.

Mr Hampton: In fact, the McGuinty government thinks it's so fair that they're going to increase the taxes on that single-parent mom by 24%. Is that your definition of fairness?

Another fact: A couple, where his taxable income is $50,000 a year and her taxable income is $50,000 a year,

is going to pay an additional $1,200 under your health tax. Somebody who has an income of half a million dollars a year is only going to pay $900. And, oh yes, the insurance companies' profits increased by 500% over last year, and the banks have a $3.1-billion profit for the first quarter of this year, and you're going to give them a $1-billion tax reduction.

I put it to you and the Premier again: This is a gross distortion of fairness and justice in the tax system. It is grossly unfair to give banks and insurance companies a billion-dollar tax reduction while you say to someone else, "You have to pay $1,200." What's your explanation?

1430

Hon Mr Sorbara: Let's get to the gross distortions put out by that member and that party. Let's just talk about the fact that in the budget that we presented in this House, the reduction in capital tax will mean this government forgoing about $900,000. That is one half of what my friend the leader of the New Democratic Party will be receiving, $1.8 million to that band of eight members, as a result of the by-election in Hamilton East.

What is much more important about our budget is the fact that we will have some 9,000 additional cardiac surgeries, some 36,000 additional heart procedures, and free vaccinations for every Ontario child for pneumonia, for meningitis and for chickenpox. This budget—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Hampton: I'm happy to hear more promises from Liberals. I'm always happy to hear promises from Liberals because everybody in Ontario, and now across Canada, knows that you never fulfill your promises.

But I want to talk again about the capital tax, those poor impoverished banks and those insurance companies that racked up profits of over $2 billion last year and have increased those profits by 500% this year. You've now admitted that you, over the course of this budget and through this budget, are going to give them a billion-dollar tax reduction every year over the next four years. While working families are being hit to the tune of $2 billion a year through your unfair and regressive tax, the banks and insurance companies will be paying less and less. I put it to you, that is a grossly unfair, grossly unjust tax system, going after working families for $1,200 a year while you give the banks and insurance companies what amounts to a billion-dollar tax reduction. How do you justify that?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I will ultimately invite my friend from Kenora-Rainy River to apologize to this Parliament for the distortions that he has presented in that question, but I'll tell you something that is absolute fact: In the fall, that member and that party voted against Bill 2. Bill 2 rolled back all of the corporate income tax cuts that the previous government had put in place. That bill eliminated the seniors' tax credit for high-income senior earners. That bill scrapped the private school tax credit. That's a bill that was supported by people right across Ontario. One small group voted against it: that caucus and that opposition. I tell my friend from Kenora-Rainy River, one day he will have an opportunity to actually read the budget and find out what is in it. Then his questions in this Parliament can be taken somewhat more seriously.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: I have the budget. Here is what it says: Somebody who has an income of $30,000 a year will pay an extra $300 in income tax. That's a 24% tax increase. For a family where he is a teacher and has a taxable income of $50,000, and she is a nurse and has a taxable income of $50,000, they're going to pay an additional $1,200 a year while the banks and the insurance companies pay nothing extra. In fact, they get a billion-dollar tax reduction from Dalton McGuinty and Greg Sorbara.

But I want to ask you about a couple who are struggling on that $30,000-a-year income—he has $30,000 and she has $30,000. They've just had their hydro cut off because they can't afford to pay the hydro bill. Now you're going to take an additional $600 a year out of their pocket. Can you tell me, when they're already having trouble paying their hydro bill, how they are going to be able to get light, power, keep their food and have hot water when are you going to take another $600 out of their pocket?

Hon Mr Sorbara: This from a member of a party that, when they were in power, raised taxes on people earning $20,000 way back then—I just want to make sure I get this one right—by $120. Using his mathematics, that would probably be a 50% or 60% tax increase.

This is the party that jacked up hydro rates, my friend the Minister of Energy will remind me, 43%. This is the party that said, "Elect us and we'll bring you public auto insurance." Then they got elected and said, "Well, no, we're not going to do that." This is the party that campaigned on the sacredness of collective agreements, got elected, and ripped up every single one in the province. This is a party which during this federal campaign can't figure out what they want to say to the people of Ontario. They're ignored here and they're ignored across the nation.

Mr Hampton: I get the impression that neither the Premier nor the Minister of Finance want to answer this question that comes from two real people. He has an income of $30,000 a year; she has an income of $30,000 a year. They have two kids. Her name is Kurin Roller. His name is Noel Bouvier. They live near Kenora. They believed you when you said you were going to cap hydro rates. Since then, their hydro bill has gone out of sight. It's not their fault that they have electric heat. They can't pay their hydro bill, so Hydro came and cut off their electricity. They have no water. They have no sewer now. They can't keep food in the fridge. They have no lights. They asked me, "How are we going to pay our hydro bill now when Mr McGuinty and Mr Sorbara are going to take another $600 out of our pocket?"

I'm asking you for an answer. How do they pay the bills, whether it's auto insurance that you've increased or hydro that you've increased or now another $600 that

you want to take out of their modest-income pockets? How do they do this, Minister?

Hon Mr Sorbara: As a result of the measures we've taken in the budget, the children of that family and families right across Ontario will have free vaccinations. They will have—

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): They're paying for it, Greg. They're paying for it with their premiums.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I wonder if my friend from Nickel Belt has any interest in the answer at all.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I want to tell my friend that they will have more urgent access to community health care. Their parents will have better home care. In their communities, a family health team will provide medical services urgently in a community on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week basis. More importantly than that, that family, participating in what we are doing in health care, will be able to rely on the fact that this province will have the best health care system in the country and on the continent.

Mr Hampton: Minister, here's the problem. You see, they'd just like to have the power turned on so that she can have a shower before she goes to work in the morning, so that their kids can have a shower before they have to go to school, so that their kids can have a hot meal, so that they can keep food in the refrigerator safely. You jacked up their hydro bill. Now you're going to take another $600 a year out of their pockets to pay your unfair tax, and they don't know how they're going to make it.

I think you owe these people an answer. Will you at least ensure that their power gets turned on so that they can start to do something? As it stands right now, you're taking money out of their pockets on hydro, you're taking money out of their pockets on this health tax, you're taking money out of their pockets if they need to get auto insurance. They can't pay all the bills, and they want to know why they are being hit, while those impoverished banks and those poor insurance companies are getting a billion-dollar tax reduction.

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend is talking about a family whose combined income is $60,000 a year. The fact is, he knows that we have a program to assist ratepayers who are having trouble with their hydro bills as a result of that program.

Mr Hampton: They already tried and were turned down.

Hon Mr Sorbara: He also knows that a family earning $60,000 in the province of Ontario is earning just about the median of the average industrial wage.

He knows as well that for those who are the most vulnerable in Ontario, our budget provided the first relief—whether someone was on a disability program or on social assistance or had kids who required assistance in mental health, for the first time in 11 years we've started to move on that front. I want to tell my friend that we are very, very proud of that part of our budget, as we are every part of the budget.

1440

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Minister of Transportation. I hope the minister is aware that there is at least one Web site on the Internet that is currently selling Ontario driver's licences. I went on the site this morning, and the licence for sale is now on sale; it's normally $100, and it's now at $90. What steps have you taken to ensure that these fake documents are not being passed off as genuine?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First of all, I am really not aware of that, and I will make sure that I check it out. The steps we are taking are that we are already working to have the driver's licence safety strengthened. We are working with other jurisdictions and other provinces to make sure we can incorporate the security features so the driver's licences are not faked and the security of the drivers can be protected.

Mr Runciman: It's astounding that the minister is not aware. I'll send over the Web site address. Clearly this government continues to indicate that security is very much a low priority.

Interjections.

Mr Runciman: We are talking about a foundation document here that can be purchased on the Internet to build an identity, and the Liberals think that's funny. Let the people watching this today have a clear indication—

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): You're funny.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Runciman: —laughing that someone can go on the Internet, buy an Ontario driver's licence, build a fake identity in this province and do who knows what to this country and the United States. That's funny to Liberals. Well, it isn't funny to Conservatives.

I ask the minister, will he give us an indication of what systems he has in place to protect the integrity of Ontario driver's licences? There's obviously nothing, but I would like to have an indication, if he doesn't have one, of when he is going to do something about it.

Hon Mr Takhar: I'm sure maybe the member doesn't want to hear what I have to say, but what I said is that my ministry is actively pursuing the development and implementation and attempting to eliminate all the defrauding of driver's licences.

I also want to say that under the Tories, birth certificates were being defrauded, and they did nothing to prevent it. I don't know where the safety was at that point in time.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the Premier. On Friday we held a press conference at my constituency office in Kapuskasing which

various health care professionals attended, from physiotherapists to eye doctors to chiropractors. They are all rather upset in regard to the delisting of services that you have put in place.

In fact, one of the people who happened to just be walking by that particular press conference outside our constituency office related that she had attended an eye exam by her eye doctor about three years ago, and as a result of that she had been found to have a malignant cancer behind her eye. If it hadn't been for that particular eye exam, she said she would be dead today.

In your budget, you describe eye tests, along with chiropractic care and physiotherapy, as "less critical services." How can that be a less critical service?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Just so we're clear about what will and will not be covered now with respect to optometry services, we will continue to cover all Ontarians over the age of 65 and under the age of 20. All medically necessary eye examinations will continue to be covered, regardless of the patient's age, including for things like glaucoma or diabetes. We're also going to institute a program for low-income Ontarians. Ontario was the only province that provided coverage for routine eye exams for adults between the ages of 20 and 64. We made a difficult decision. Any savings generated as a result of this will be invested in shorter waits when it comes to things like chemotherapy and radiation.

Mr Bisson: Premier, this constituent in Kapuskasing is not over age 65, she is not under age 20, she is not diabetic and she doesn't have a family doctor—

Interjection: To get a referral.

Mr Bisson: —to get the referral. I say to you again, how can you call the services of optometrists less critical in this case? That woman said she would have died if she had found herself with that cancer after your budget. How do you answer her?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, Ontario was the only province that fully funded routine eye exams for all adults. What we're saying now is that if you're 65 or over, we've got it covered; under the age of 20, we've got that covered; and all medically necessary eye examinations are still going to be covered.

One of the other things we're going to do is a matter of investing in what we believe ought to be our highest priorities: There are going to be 150 family health teams. This is community-based primary care reform, which is all about ensuring that this particular individual has access to a physician, a nurse practitioner and other nurses, and it's not a matter of being over 65 or under 20. Family health teams will be accessible to all Ontarians. It's not a matter of age. What we're doing is making investments to ensure that all Ontarians have access to a family doctor and a nurse practitioner.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Since taking office, growing a strong economy has been a priority for this government; as we know, it is not a priority for the NDP. It was an important part of our recent budget, and I know it continues to be of importance for the people of Ontario. What evidence can you provide that the Ontario economy is strengthening?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): The good news is that in the first few months of 2004, we've seen solid growth in virtually all aspects of the economy, from retail sales to strength in the housing market to a growing consumer sector, and very good news for the month of May: an increase of some 30,000-plus jobs, very many of them full-time jobs.

Mr Fonseca: Minister, you mentioned a strong increase in employment numbers. Finding quality employment that can provide a better quality of life is of high importance to many of my constituents and, indeed, to many people in this province. The fact that there are more jobs does not necessarily mean better jobs. What types of jobs are experiencing growth, and in what areas?

Hon Mr Sorbara: It's kind of across the spectrum, but as far as job creation in May and April—I think there were some 14,000 new jobs created in April. The good news is that the vast majority of these jobs are full-time jobs, many in the health care and social assistance sector, but if you go right across the economy, from automotive to primary industries, you see strength in the economy.

The housing sector, which is so vital to the continued strength of the Ontario economy, continues to show vigorous growth. In fact, housing resale in the last month reported was the highest ever recorded in the history of the province. We are coming into the summer season. I would suggest to you that we are coming into a very strong period of economic growth in the province, and that of course makes all of us in this House very happy indeed.

WEST NILE VIRUS

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. York region residents are very concerned about potential threats to their health resulting from West Nile virus. What actions should people be taking if they find a dead crow on their property—in their backyard—to assist the local medical officer of health with regard to this?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Health not being here, I'll do my very best to speak to the issue. The advice we're giving Ontarians is they should be contacting their local public health authority and informing them that there may be a crow, in particular—I understand it's the bird of special interest—and putting them on notice and providing them with that information.

1450

Mr Klees: Well, Premier, your plan isn't working. Your medical officer of health is clearly not on the job. I have had a number of calls within the last two weeks from people in York region who have told me that they have, in fact, done as you suggest. They have contacted

the local medical officer of health. In fact, there's a hotline. When they do, they were told, as recently as this past weekend, "Well, we'll get around to it. We may be able to get there within the next couple of days." Yet the same Web site says that the specimen must be picked up within 12 hours in order to do the appropriate testing to determine whether or not spraying should take place.

Why is the medical officer of health for the province not on the job? Why is the medical officer of health for York region not on the job? Will you, sir, please take the initiative to ensure that your medical officer of health does what is supposed to be done under these circumstances, because York region residents are at risk because of their inability to do their job.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Many things have been said in the past about Dr Sheela Basrur, but never has she been criticized in the way that she has just been criticized by the member opposite. She is on the job. She is assuming her responsibility.

We have a public campaign underway. Beyond that, we are going to upload another 25% of the cost connected with the delivery of public health services, because we are assuming that responsibility.

This is a government that was accused by the previous chief medical officer of health of the province of Ontario of turning its back on public health. We are assuming our responsibility when it comes to delivering good quality public health in the province of Ontario.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Premier. We hear every day and all through the media that you are claiming that every penny of health care taxes are going to health care. Nobody believes you, Mr Premier. They don't trust you with their dollars. They know that billions of dollars are going into that great big black hole to be ripped apart and subsumed.

I'm telling you, there is no dedicated fund for those taxes that you are talking about. They are going straight into general revenues where they can be spent on roads, sewers and anything else that you determine. My question to you is that you are dramatically raising taxes on modest- and medium-income people, and now those same people are learning that it is not even going to health care.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I have no idea whatsoever where the member is getting that misinformation. The raising of this premium was a difficult decision and I can assure you it's not one that we took lightly. But I can tell you this: Every single penny that will be generated as a result of this new health care premium will be invested in better quality health care for the people of Ontario. Of that, there is no doubt whatsoever.

Mr Prue: As Socrates once said, "I would gladly believe you, sir, but not against my better judgment."

Modest- and middle-income people know that there's a fat new tax for them, and they also know that there's no tax increase for banks and corporations. You have not been straight with the people of Ontario. There is no dedicated health care fund. There is no box on the income tax form that says this money is to go to health care. The reality is that it is all going to general revenue, every single penny of it. You can give no guarantee whatsoever, because of the way you have structured this, that any money at all is going into health.

My question to you is, should the people of Ontario believe you and trust you after the legion of broken promises that you have made here in this House over the last eight months?

Hon Mr McGuinty: If there was some kind of law against trafficking in misinformation and scaremongering, then they would be the subject of many, many arrests.

Let me tell you what Ontarians are going to get for this premium. They're going to get immunizations for 600,000 children in our first year. We're going to reduce wait times to—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Could I ask the leader of the third party to come to order.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I'm agreeing with the Premier.

The Speaker: Order. Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: In addition to the 600,000 Ontario children who will receive free immunizations this year, during the course of our mandate we're going to be creating 8,000 new full-time nursing positions; 150 family health teams; nine new MRI and CT sites; 100,000 more Ontarians will receive home care; children's mental health will receive a healthy injection for the first time in 12 years.

The other thing we're going to do is, we're going to start to make up for lost time because of cuts made to medical school spaces by the former NDP government: We're building a new medical school in northern Ontario; we're going to double the number of spaces for international medical graduates; and we're going to ensure that Ontarians can actually get access to a family doctor.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Credit Valley Conservation is an important organization in my riding of Brampton Centre. When the CVC was created in 1954, the Credit River and its communities were facing great challenges. Property-damaging floods were a regular occurrence. In summer, water flow was reduced to a trickle, and in some areas sewage, industrial discharge and sediment polluted our water. Since the formation of Credit Valley Conservation, a slow but steady recovery has occurred.

However, in 1996 the previous government cut the conservation authority funding from $7 million to less than $200,000, and at the same time increased financial

pressures on the authority through provincial downloading. What initiatives is your ministry taking to assist the authority in its responsibility?

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I'd like to thank my colleague from Brampton Centre for this very important question. The Ontario budget enhanced the eligibility criteria for the conservation land property tax exemption program. This means that the lands with natural and environmental significance owned by conservation authorities and conservation land trusts may be eligible to receive tax relief under this program. This expansion will increase the ability of these organizations to preserve lands with natural and environmental significance in a manner that is more reflective of the regional conservation objectives and priorities of the local communities.

I'd like to add that the MNR also will be providing $7.6 million in this fiscal year to our 36 conservation authorities across Ontario.

Mrs Jeffrey: Credit Valley Conservation and the Ontario conservation authority have maintained the environment for the benefit of all Ontarians. To their credit, there is as much forest cover in the Peel watershed now as there was 100 years ago. As well, Atlantic salmon, which have not been seen in the river in 150 years, are beginning to return.

But due to the previous government cuts, Credit Valley Conservation has had to lay off half of its staff, cut its board in half and cut programs such as stewardship and natural heritage programs. Our municipalities have expressed great concern because they have endured increasing costs to assist the authority.

We saw the results of a previous government's cuts during the Walkerton disaster. Our government made a commitment to support the environment. Is our government committed to ensuring source water protection?

Hon Mr Ramsay: The MNR is contributing to a healthier Ontario by spending an additional $32 million on watershed-based source protection programs, which complements the $60 million that my colleague the Minister of the Environment is also spending on these clean water programs. A portion of this funding will go to conservation authorities to fulfill their responsibility in source protection planning.

This new funding for source water protection planning initially supports capacity building in the form of resource expertise, completion of technical studies, information management, systems development, formation of the watershed region, and planning committee process. On April 14 of this year, a new regulation was passed in the Conservation Authority Act that provides conservation authorities with an updated regulatory framework to control development, filling and related activities in water systems, shorelines and wetlands.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): My question is to my good friend the Minister of Finance. It is my understanding that your assistant deputy minister wrote to the trailer industry coalition on May 27 regarding the problematic assessment and taxation of recreational trailers used on a seasonal basis. This letter, which I'm reading here, indicates that ministry staff would be pleased to work with the coalition to explore the designation of a proposed new tag system.

I commend you on your staff working to find solutions. It's my hope that you'll find an agreeable solution that fits all the needs, not just in my riding of Durham but throughout Ontario.

As we enter the trailer and camping season, you know just how important it is to bring stability to this industry. I recently spoke with Roger Faulkner, Al Robinson and the Goreskis in my riding of Durham. They have the solution—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): And the question?

Mr O'Toole: Minister, are you committed to working to find a solution to recreational trailers as we enter the camping season in Ontario?

1500

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I think the simple answer to my friend is that we most certainly are. That's one of the reasons why we cancelled the retroactive aspects of the trailer system. It's a problem that we inherited. We have begun to make some progress. We cancelled the retroactive application of that system.

The piece of really good news that I have for my friend is that my parliamentary assistant, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, Mike Colle, is taking on the next phase of reforms in property tax and the problems with MPAC which we've heard about in this House. I'm sure that under his direction we're going to be able to solve this problem in a timely fashion.

Mr O'Toole: I think just simply doing the right thing is the answer. I need your commitment today to work with the coalition to implement the tag system before the instability that you've created in the industry. I commend you for looking at the retroactive tax situation in this case, as you should have looked in other cases, I might add.

I want to commend the member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, Laurie Scott, as well as Tim Hudak from Erie-Lincoln. We've worked tirelessly and patiently with you and with Mr Colle on this issue. We want your commitment today to solve this problem. Write the letter. Do the right thing for the hard-working people of Ontario, and you'll find support on this side of the House. Admit today, are you going to do the right thing and implement the tag system?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Here's the commitment that he'll get from me, and it will be firm and unequivocal: We are going to work on this problem and solve it, notwithstanding that the folks that he was governing with up until last October 2 had quite a long time to do something with it and did absolutely nothing. We're going to solve it. But I will not, in this context, make a commitment to adopt any specific solution. We need, as my friend from

Durham knows, to do a little bit more work on this. One of the things that we are doing is extending the assessment period so we have a breather of six months—uniformly praised right across Ontario. We've got a breather of about six months to get some of this stuff right. I will commit to him today that we will get it right.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question again is to the Premier, this time on the same issue but a different community.

On Saturday morning, physiotherapists and various eye care specialists, along with chiropractors, assembled at my constituency office for a press conference in order to bemoan the situation in Timmins when it comes to your delisting of important essential health services. The point they make is this: In a situation where we already have a critical shortage of physicians in the north, as well as in other parts of Ontario, patients will have no choice but to suffer pain, in the case of chiropractors, and upon the pain becoming intolerable will have to either go to a doctor's office or to an emergency ward that's already having problems to get health services.

Tell me how delisting health care services for these people is going to assist an already difficult situation when it comes to essential health services for physicians in northern Ontario.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Again, one of the things that we're going to do with the savings generated by no longer covering certain kinds of services—which, by the way, and I know the member would not disagree with me in this particular regard, are not mandated under the terms of the Canada Health Act—is trying to make up for the closure of medical school spaces many years ago during the NDP government and the shortage of doctors. So we're building a medical school in northern Ontario. We have doubled the number of spaces available for international medical graduates. Beyond that, we are investing in 150 family health teams, to bring primary care to every community in Ontario. Now, this is a challenge we've set for ourselves. But in order to make those investments, it was essential that we make some difficult choices, and we have.

Mr Bisson: Premier, you don't get it. Not only are you not going to save any money with this situation, you're going to make a bad situation worse. We have a critical shortage of doctors and physicians across northern Ontario, as do other parts of this province. You're going to be basically shifting patients from chiropractors, eye doctors and physiotherapists, into either an emergency ward that can't deal with them or a doctor's office that doesn't have the time to deal with them either.

My question to you is simply this: How does delisting these important essential services of chiropractors and others assist the situation when it comes to an already critical shortage of doctors in northern Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I think the public is entitled to know exactly what experts in the area have said in response to our budget. Here's a quote from Doris Grinspun, executive director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. She says Ontarians are the real winners: "I am delighted with the focus on health care, and even more delighted with the focus on real transformation of the system ... home health care, primary health care ... long-term care and public health."

This is from an expert who works together with thousands of nurses on the front lines. We are receiving support for our plan to move ahead with primary care reform and to make sure there are more doctors available in all our communities, including northern Ontario.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): My question is for the Minister of Finance. The Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce is responsible for the grow bonds initiative, that will allow northerners to invest in themselves. Many small to medium-sized northern enterprises have difficulty accessing capital.

We in northern Ontario are very proud of this local initiative and the positive impacts it can have for all of northern Ontario. We thank you and our government for moving forward with grow bonds. Can you provide some detail at this point as to what the program will look like?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I've just recently come back from both Thunder Bay and Sudbury, and the part of the budget that made me proudest was the initiatives we're taking in respect of northern Ontario, and in particular the way in which I think the northern prosperity program is going to help generate more new and vibrant economic growth there. I was particularly appreciative of my friend from Parry Sound-Muskoka making some real, honest, positive comments about the grow bond program.

In brief, the program will provide capital for small and medium-sized businesses, new or expanding. The principle and interest of the bonds will be guaranteed by the province of Ontario. It makes very much needed private capital available to a wide variety of businesses right across the northern part of the province.

Mr Mauro: I want to thank you again for listening to the needs of northern Ontario. We're very excited about the program. Can you tell me when the grow bonds pilot project will begin in northern Ontario?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Good question. The answer is, that really is up to the members of the opposition, including my friend from Parry Sound-Muskoka. In order to implement the grow bonds program, we need to pass legislation in this House. Governments can't simply lend money without legislative authority.

So we will soon be bringing forward legislation. We hope and expect that by the end of the year legislation will be in place and the northern grow bonds program can become part of a new and emerging northern economy.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Premier. With each passing day, it becomes more obvious that you and your government had little understanding of the consequences of the actions in your budget. If we take a look at the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic school board, both have clauses that date back to about 1990 that ensure that if the government institutes a health care premium, it will be covered by the board for its staff. That would mean, for the Toronto District School Board, that it would cost taxpayers about $10 million. Will you guarantee that you will not hurt Ontario's students by taking money out of the classroom to pay for your new health tax?

1510

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): To the Minister of Finance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): My friend is fully aware that I have made public, clear, unequivocal statements that the Ontario health premium which was provided for in this budget is not a premium for the purposes of those collective agreements. She can scaremonger as much as she wants in this House. She can suggest that the vitality of the Toronto District School Board or the Toronto Catholic District School Board is threatened by this premium. It is not a premium for the purposes of those collective agreements, and the legislation we'll bring forward in this House will make that eminently clear.

Mrs Witmer: It's obvious the government does not understand the consequences of this initiative in their budget, because according to the leaders of the unions, they are going to insist that these premiums be honoured. So I guess I would say to you again, can you guarantee that not one cent of the money you are going to give to school boards is going to be used to pay the unions for this tax? Are you going to guarantee that you will not take any money out of the classroom for our students?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend has dealt with collective agreements. She knows full well that there may be unions in this province—or an employer—that will try and bargain to participate in a salary increase related to the health premium. If she wants me to use this time and space to intervene in the normal collective bargaining that will be going on, she's got another think coming. She is absolutely wrong.

All I can tell her is—and I'll tell her once again, very clearly—the Ontario health premium is not a premium for the purposes of those collective agreements, because failure to pay the premium does not disqualify the individual from the health care services of this province; failure to pay the premium represents simply a violation of the Ontario Income Tax Act, full stop.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Premier. I received a call last week from the office of a doctor who was very eager to meet with me. I discovered that it was a doctor of chiropractic, and why did that doctor want to meet with me? She wanted to meet with me in order to deliver scores and scores of letters from patients who are outraged over the delisting of chiropractic services.

Hamilton is an industrial city. Many citizens have ongoing issues of pain. They have ongoing issues of health management and pain management that are assisted by chiropractic and physiotherapy appointments. I was elected to be a strong voice on behalf of those residents of Hamilton East.

My question to you is: When will they get the kind of response they need from this government? When will this government admit its error in judgment in regard to the delisting of these programs and these essential health services?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Again, just so we don't lose sight of the facts here, prior to the changes we're making here with respect to the provision of chiropractic services, we were only covering $150 per patient on an annual basis. We will invest the approximately $100 million saved from eliminating these payments in priority health care areas, such as reducing waiting times for lifesaving services such as MRIs, CT scans and cardiac care; we're going to hire more nurses and doctors; and we're going to create family health teams—in fact, 150. It's a difficult decision, but it's what we decided to do. You've got to establish where your priorities are, and that's what we've done.

Ms Horwath: My priorities are in speaking out on behalf of the residents of the riding I represent, which is one of the lowest-income ridings in this province, and so it's very important that I bring to your attention that $150 is a lot of money for the people living in Hamilton East. The costs of these services are going to be even greater to our health care system when these people are forced into emergency rooms and forced into greater visits for primary care.

I ask you once again, when can we expect the government to admit the error of its ways, to just admit they made a mistake and ensure that these people can afford the services they need?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I can appreciate that the member is sincere in raising concerns on behalf of her constituents. There is no doubt about that whatsoever. But I would also hope that she's going to inform her constituents about some of the wonderful things we're doing by way of investment in health care by means of this budget.

Interjection.

Hon Mr McGuinty: We're going to bring immunizations for 600,000 children this year. We're going to reduce wait times for cardiac care, cataract surgeries, hip and joint replacements; 8,000 new full-time nursing positions—I'm sure the member will be interested in that; 150 family health teams; nine new MRI and CT sites. Close to 100,000 more Ontarians will receive home

care. We're increasing the quality of care available to the 70,000-plus seniors who take up residence in our nursing homes.

Those are the kinds of investments we are making. We think they're good investments, we think they're sound investments, but they're the result of making some difficult choices. We've made those choices and now we're making the investments.

BOCCE BALL

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): My question is for the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. On June 2, 2004, Stephen Harper, during a radio interview with FAN 590 regarding infrastructure funding, is quoted as saying, "That's where you end up with bocce courts instead of highways." At the same time Mr Harper, in regard to public spending, said, "Ultimately you can hold David Miller and the municipalities accountable for the decisions they are making."

A bocce court, I believe, is similar to lawn bowling and serves its purpose as both a recreational and therapeutic pastime. Many of our constituents would say that that is money well spent. How do you see the need of financing bocce courts in your ministry?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): It's extremely important. First of all, I'm surprised that Mr Harper wouldn't be aware that sports such as bocce are important for our health and well-being. It's a lifelong sport that keeps people active and gives them a chance to socialize with their friends. It has a particular appeal among one of Ontario's largest multicultural communities. It's a great way for older people to remain active and healthy.

I must say to the member that Canada is obviously bigger and more diverse than Mr Harper thinks. No matter what it looks like from Calgary Southwest, Mr Harper has to learn about the diversity of Canada. Then maybe he would know that bocce is a Canadian sport, that it's exceedingly important in terms of a person's overall health that many people in this community of Toronto in particular, but also right across this country, enjoy. I'm surprised that Mr Harper would pick on bocce one more time when it's a wonderful sport for all Canadians. I think it's somewhat of an insult to those who play bocce ball.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I have a petition entitled "Reject Bill 8—Keep Ontario Government Hands Off Hospital Workers' Contracts.

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 8, the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2003; and

"Whereas Bill 8 paves the legal path for the government to restructure Ontario's hospitals through privatization and contracting-out of services; and

"Whereas Bill 8 would, if passed, give the government the authority to break or vary existing contracts of employment; and

"Whereas Bill 8, if passed, would give the government the authority to override provisions in employment agreements; and

"Whereas this government authority granted by Bill 8 could result in the breaking of contracts with hospital and other health care workers that were bargained in good faith, thus jeopardizing their future employment;

"We, the undersigned, request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the standing committee on justice and social policy to reject Bill 8 in its entirety and prevent government from altering collectively bargained agreements for hospital workers across Ontario."

I sign this petition.

1520

PENSION PLANS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Stelpipe Ltd and Welland Pipe Ltd are currently operating under the protection of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, as part of the restructuring process being undertaken by Stelco Inc; and

"Whereas there is a significant unfunded liability in the Stelpipe and Welland Pipe pension plans for hourly employees; and

"Whereas there will be a significant negative impact on the pensions of both active employees and retirees in the event of a windup of these pension plans; and

"Whereas the pension benefits guarantee fund does not protect the entire amount of accrued pension benefits; and

"Whereas the pension benefits guarantee fund may not have sufficient assets to provide such protection;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"(1) to amend the provisions of the PBGF in order that it provides complete coverage and protection for the accrued pension benefits of all pension plan members;

"(2) to amend the financing provisions for the PBGF in order to ensure that sufficient funds are available to provide for the complete protection of all accrued pension benefits;

"(3) to take interim action as required in order to provide immediate protection of the accrued pension benefits for both active employees and retirees of Stelpipe and Welland Pipe."

Signed by hundreds. I've affixed my signature as well.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL PARKWAY

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alexander Graham Bell, renowned inventor of society-altering technological inventions such as the telephone, greatly revolutionized the daily lives of people in Ontario, Canada and," indeed, "the world; and

"Whereas Alexander Graham Bell's contributions to science, technology and society as a whole were in part developed and tested while he lived in Brantford, Ontario; and

"Whereas Brantford lies at the heart of the section of the 403 which runs from Woodstock to Burlington;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To adopt and pass into law Dave Levac's private member's bill, Bill 44, the Alexander Graham Bell Parkway Act, renaming Highway 403 between Woodstock and Burlington as a tribute to this great inventor," and Canadian and Brantfordian.

I sign my name to this and give this to our page Jason.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to present this on behalf of some high school students in north Simcoe. A petition to the Minister of the Environment, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the county of Simcoe:

"Whereas landfill site 41 has the potential to pollute a major source of fresh water supply and affect the life and well-being of present and future generations; and

"Whereas many engineering features related to the site construction are grossly flawed; and

"Whereas landfill site 41 will have a negative impact on many acres of number one and number two farmland; and

"Whereas landfill site 41 has the potential to interfere and possibly cause loss of life due to its close proximity to Huronia airport; and

"Whereas we, as the youth of this part of the province of Ontario, will be left with this unwelcome legacy; and

"Whereas no one has given us the opportunity to be heard on this issue from its inception;

"We, the undersigned youth of Ontario, petition the Minister of the Environment, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the county of Simcoe to correct this gross error in judgment and to stop this madness which will impact on our lives and those of our children and grandchildren."

I'm very pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

SNOWMOBILING

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"As an avid snowmobiler, my spending on snowmobile-related purchases and hospitality services and amenities while riding contributes to the annual $1-billion economic impact of snowmobiling in communities in rural Ontario and northern Ontario. My spending helps drive the winter tourism season for much of our province, creating jobs, opportunities and businesses that would not otherwise exist. I am very concerned that my ability to continue snowmobiling in Ontario is threatened by the unaffordable costs of the personal insurance required for my snowmobile. I am also very concerned that the massive costs of third-party liability insurance necessary to cover trails, clubs, volunteers and landowners is forcing fee increases in the trail permit I must buy.

"Therefore, I ask the provincial government to act immediately to implement short-term steps that recognize and alleviate these two insurance problems for next winter, and also to develop long-term solutions to restore snowmobiling insurance to practical and affordable levels so that I can continue to participate and so that snowmobiling can continue to flourish as a major winter tourism generator."

These were delivered to me by Roger Girard of Val Therese, who lives in Nickel Belt. I agree with him and I've affixed my signature to this.

VISITOR

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas I have my mother visiting this Assembly today from Winnipeg, Manitoba; and

"Whereas I wish to comply with the Speaker's rules of introduction; and

"Whereas my family would be very disappointed if she was not recognized;

"We, the undersigned, welcome Noella Lawrence to this Legislative Assembly this afternoon."

I have affixed my signature.

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition signed by thousands of my constituents and people concerned about Muskoka being taken out of the north. It's a petition to keep Muskoka part of northern Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the district of Muskoka is currently designated as part of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the geography and socio-economic conditions of Muskoka are very similar to the rest of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the median family income in the district of Muskoka is $10,000 below the provincial average and $6,000 below the median family income for greater Sudbury; and

"Whereas removing the district of Muskoka from northern Ontario would adversely affect the hard-working people of Muskoka by restricting access to programs and incentives enjoyed by residents of other northern communities; and

"Whereas the residents of Muskoka should not be confused with those who cottage or vacation in the district; and

"Whereas the federal government of Canada recognizes the district of Muskoka as part of the north; and

"Whereas this is a mean-spirited and politically motivated decision on the part of the McGuinty government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government maintain the current definition of northern Ontario for the purposes of government policy and program delivery."

I support this petition with its thousands of signatures, and sign my name to it.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas auto insurance rates continue to skyrocket, contrary to the official position of the Liberal government and the insurance industry; and

"Whereas more and more drivers are being cut off by their insurance companies for no valid reason and are being dumped into the Facility Association; and

"Whereas all attempts to regulate the auto insurance industry have failed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Ontario government immediately introduce legislation that would bring to Ontario a public, not-for-profit automobile insurance program similar to the ones currently in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia."

Signed by thousands. I have affixed my signature as well.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): "Whereas the current method of allocating municipal tax revenues to the taxpayer by property tax based on current market value" assessment "has the following unwanted characteristics:

"(1) The tax burden varies subject to the desirability of a location, making taxes unpredictable and difficult to budget for;

"(2) The relative market value of a property is subjective and variable and subject to disagreement;

"(3) Long-time residents on fixed incomes in particular are affected, causing hardship, but this problem also affects young families;

"(4) Neighbourhood instability is increased as house sales are accelerated beyond the normal rate of neighbourhood renewal;

"(5) Residents who have done no home improvements pay increased taxes because of new higher cost development in a neighbourhood, out of their control, and perceive this as unfair;

"(6) Widely different property taxes caused by market value pay for equivalent services for each resident, without any apparent conscious policy, social good, and regardless of ability to pay...;

"(7) Long-standing policy exempts the sale of a principal residence from capital gains tax, yet current value assessment effectively contradicts this, causing a prepaid capital gains penalty based on a latent value which may never be realized;

"(8) Resentment in one part of a community that it is paying more than its fair share can lead to division and other socially undesirable effects; and

"Whereas these undesirable effects, which are sufficient ... on their own for our petition, are exacerbated by the increased reliance on the property tax to fund a greater range of government programs as instituted by the former government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"To change the method of property assessment so that it becomes based on objective criteria, using a formula such as lot size in conjunction with building total exterior dimensions, and removes the location and desirability factor from the calculation."

I affix my name hereto, as I support the petition.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here presented to me last Friday. It's signed by hundreds, if not thousands, of my constituents, and it is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Re support for chiropractic services in Ontario health insurance plan:

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best

interests of the public, patients, the health care system," and the government of the province.

I affix my signature, as I totally agree with it.

1530

DRIVER EXAMINATIONS FOR SENIORS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas regarding the AZ driver testing, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The following are some of the concerns which truck drivers and driver-owners between the ages of 65 and 75 years have incurred:

"We feel that the province of Ontario discriminates against AZ drivers once they reach the age of 65 by requiring them to be retested in the same manner as a person who has no experience, ie, written test, air brake test, road test, medical and vision. These tests can become very costly by losing time off work; renting or leasing equipment for road tests.

"This form of testing is only required by the province of Ontario. Every other province in Canada and every state in the United States only require vision and medical exams for licence renewal.

"A driver's history can be checked through the licence point system and also through CVOR system. The testing system in Ontario is so overloaded with new applicants, it doesn't make sense to require drivers with 25-30 years' experience to add to the problem by being tested. Some drivers have to make appointments 100 miles from their home to be retested before their birthday. There are cases where an independent owner-operator has been tested and failed and not been able to drive his own truck home because his licences have been downgraded on the spot. Now he has to absorb more costs to get his equipment home. It seems common sense has become rather uncommon. The ministry seems to have the attitude that once we reach 65 years of age, we wake up one morning and forget everything we ever learned. Maybe we should hold our doctors, lawyers and especially our political leaders to the same standard.

"We feel that an annual medical and vision test should be adequate to maintain our AZ driving privilege."

It's signed by hundreds, and I have affixed my signature as well.

RETIREMENT HOMES

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas elderly citizens living in retirement homes have no provincial legislation to protect them. Retirement homes are uninspected, unmonitored and unregulated; the quality of care varies widely. We are asking" the provincial Legislature "to implement regular inspections with the authority to impose violations, charges and penalties. To establish and ensure set standards for retirement homes must be met and adhered to."

I sign this petition with great glee. Hopefully, we can get something done about it.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill at site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

"Whereas the county of Simcoe has received, over a period of time, the necessary approvals from the Ministry of the Environment to design and construct a landfill at site 41; and

"Whereas, as part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of site 41 identified over 200 recommendations for improvements to the design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has indicated her intention to introduce legislation on water source protection, which is a final and key recommendation to be implemented under Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has announced expert panels that will make recommendations to the minister on water source protection legislation; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment will now be responsible for policing nutrient management; and

"Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario. We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of site 41 and the nearby water sources."

I'm pleased to sign my name to that.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2004 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 20, 2004, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm pleased to be able to speak to this motion, which, of course, is time

allocated. I'm joined this afternoon by Andrea Horwath, our new member for Hamilton East.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Well, read the standing orders.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask the member opposite not to refer to this as time allocated. It's provided for in the standing orders, which were agreed to by all three parties.

Mr Kormos: Precisely my point: It's time allocated, and I find that regrettable. But this is my chance to speak to it, and Ms Horwath will be speaking to it before the afternoon is over in the context of this time allocation.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Look, I don't think there's any secret about the fact that New Democrats have nothing but disgust for this budget. This budget is a vicious attack on seniors, on low-income families, on the middle class—as if they haven't carried enough of a burden—on the sick and on the poorest members of our community. Across my riding and beyond, as I've had occasion on weekends and evenings to get back home and to travel to other parts of the province, there is a unanimity among Ontarians of disdain, not only for the budget but for its authors. There is a visceral contempt out there for Liberals, a contempt that could be justified, I put to you, on any number of grounds, but that, when people are asked to explain, is clearly related to the viciousness, the meanness of this budget, a budget that gives tax cuts to the wealthiest banks and insurance companies and then picks the pockets once again of working women and men, their retired folks and their low-income sisters and brothers.

I got a message from Tracey Cruise. I know her and her family. She lives in Welland—a good woman, a good family, really hard-working people. You're not going to find harder-working folks than these. You're not going to find people who are stronger members of their community than Tracey Cruise and her family. You see, I know her and her family.

Ms Cruise wrote this to me:

"I know this is just one minuscule thing in the big picture of things, but I have to point out something about this health tax, because I've lived the situation." Bear with me, Speaker; bear with Ms Cruise.

"You have met my son before, Jay Cruise, as Helen Brown was kind enough to take him up to meet you and have a tour. We have experienced childhood cancer and all the hardships that come with it. Although Jay is now three years in remission"—and he's a bright young boy. I was so exceptionally proud to have him sitting in the members' gallery here at Queen's Park, watching question period and understanding a little better how this Parliament works, or, from case to case or time to time, how it doesn't work. "Although Jay is now three years in remission, watching the budget, it got me thinking back to those nightmare days when he was first diagnosed." Think about this, friends. This budget provoked memories of the shock, the horror, the agony, the distress and the gut-wrenching pain of this woman learning that her little boy had cancer.

"I could not work when Jay was diagnosed. Unfortunately, my boss had told me to take my time coming back to work and then suddenly my job was filled by his wife. I could not collect unemployment because I was told I was not 'available' to work (shame on me for taking my son for his chemo sessions) so disqualified for employment insurance. We were entitled to the disabled child's benefit, but because it was based on the previous year's income, when I was employed full-time, we received less than $100 a month, until we filed another year of taxes, then it could be adjusted up. The maximum is only about $375 anyhow. The additional costs that are not covered are amazing. Even with section 8 applications, not all are covered. Just Jay's medication to stop him from vomiting after chemo cost me $475 for three days' worth of pills (chemo every three weeks so" you "do the math!) and I never did get section 8 approval. My husband's plan did not cover it either and what was covered was only 60%. Not to mention the trips to Hamilton, (the cancer society was a great help), having to stay in the hospital with Jay for a week for every second treatment, the cost of food etc, etc.

1540

"Is the health tax going to be based on the same calculation, ie, your previous year's income? If that is the case, you will have families in the midst of a crisis, having to worry about all that is involved and then worried about that extra expense as well. When your child is diagnosed, it is almost impossible to work and unless you have a generous employer, you will lose one paycheque. It will be another year before their payments are adjusted downwards based on income. I have lived it and believe me," Tracey Cruise writes, "the last thing I needed to deal with when my child was sick was whether I could afford the roof over my head, not to mention the necessities of caring for my child. You have other priorities to deal with. Sure, maybe an appeal process will be in place for a situation where income is changed, but that is not the point. Your priority is dealing with your sick child, not playing with government red tape!!!!! You just don't have the time or the energy for it.

"We are faced with increasing taxes (I know another promise broken)," Ms Cruise writes, "and my husband and I were figuring the other night it takes just one pay to cover car insurance, house insurance and life insurance (huge increases.) The other pay has to take care of the mortgage, utilities (again, ever increasing.)" Gas, electricity. "The cost of gas is skyrocketing. When groceries are bought and taxes are paid ... what is left? Now a double-income family has to look at other things to cut in their already stretched budgets or take on more work. How does that benefit a family? Just seven years ago, we were able to live on one pay," Ms Cruise writes. "Seven years ago $40,000 to $50,000 was considered a good comfortable income. Today that amount is a necessity and merely a drop in the bucket. When Jay was sick, we incurred about $20,000 in debt because of lost income and increased expenses. We are still paying that debt load off. If taxes are increased, we will not be able to put the meagre amount we do now in RRSP. Is the Ontario

government going to support me when I have no retirement funds? We are the typical double-income family. We have vehicle loans. My son will start college in another year. Tuition costs are sky high, my budget is stretched to the limit. What funds will he have available? Not likely will he qualify for a loan with us as co-signers because we are stretched to the limits. We will barely be making ends meet. What is wrong with this picture?" Ms Cruise writes.

"I am just sick and fed up with it all. I have always taken each new budget with a shrug. I just feel with everything else that is happening, this is the straw that breaks the camel's back. Not only are we being taxed to death, but nothing is being done about ridiculous increases in insurance rates and utilities. In the past couple of years, I have watched my house insurance double. And that is my reward for claims-free rating!!! I won't even get into the car insurance fiasco. Jay gets his licence in June. Unfortunately, that is not the thrill it used to be. He can drive while he has his beginners, but has to give it up in June as we cannot afford the increase in the insurance rate for him once he gets his next class of licence. He works hard at his part-time job, but that is not enough to put away for college and pay $150 monthly for the increase in our car insurance. By the time insurance rates are capped, the insurance companies will have jacked our rates so high, they could live off the profits for 90 years or so. Next year, my daughter won't be doing anything extracurricular at this rate." Sad. "Next year, my daughter won't be doing anything extracurricular at this rate.

"I hope Mr McGuinty can sleep at night knowing the extra stress he has just burdened the average double-income family with. Add more taxes and solve less problems, but hey, the budget will eventually be balanced, or will it? By the time it gets balanced, more than half the population will be bankrupt.

"Sorry, I tend to get rather verbose when I get heated up about a subject! Thanks for letting me 'bend your ear.'"

I don't know whether Ms Cruise is watching—or maybe her son, Jay, is—but she should know that while I'm reading her comments—as is her right, I believe; I'm her representative. I'm proud to be Ms Cruise's and her family's voice this afternoon here in this Legislature, because Ms Cruise isn't alone. There are many more double-income families just like her. They're the sort of families that Howard Hampton and other New Democrats have been trying to talk to Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals about during the course of question period.

The views of Ms Cruise are views that are prevalent across this province. It's not one person, one family in one community. Go anywhere: Go to small-town Ontario or big-city Ontario. Go to the north. Go to rural Ontario. Here's a double-income family that acknowledges that they've been blessed, but who find themselves under attack by a government that would rather give tax breaks to the richest of banks and insurance companies, the most profitable of huge, mega, multi-billion-dollar corporations.

I want folks to know that as I've been reading the comments of Ms Cruise on to this legislative record, there is at least one Liberal heckler who has been accusing me of having fabricated this, who somehow suggests that this is a forgery. So, Tracey, at least one Liberal in this Legislature doesn't think you even exist. That's what the heckling was. "That person's not real. That's not a real letter from that woman." So the Liberals were telling me, Tracey Cruise, while I was reading your comments on to this legislative record. Liberals are saying, "You don't exist, Ms Cruise." Liberals are saying, "This is a fabrication."

You see, that's the problem. Liberals here just don't get it, do they? They just don't get it. New Democrats and other opposition members have been railing against the privatization of health care in this province under the Liberal watch; again, part and parcel of that same Liberal budget. Call it what you want. You can call it "delisting services," but when you take critical areas of health care, when you take very specific health professionals like physiotherapists or chiropractors or optometrists and tell folks that their critical medical services—and they are—are no longer to be part of our public health care system—oh, you can still go to a chiropractor; make no mistake about it. You can still go to an optometrist; make no mistake about that. You can still go to a physiotherapist, but by God, you'd better be able to do it the American way with hard, cold cash, you see? It's the American way of health care. It doesn't work in the United States, where only the wealthiest can access medical care, and low-income, and yes, even middle-income people—Ms Cruise and her family are middle-income people who have been pushed to the limit.

These are people who have worked hard all of their lives. These are people who believe in making investments. These are people who were proud to pay taxes, knowing that those taxes were investments in public education and public health care. Here's Tracey Cruise, a woman, because of her son's incredible, and I say incredibly brave and courageous, struggle, fighting his own cancer, who knows full well how important public health care is to all of our welfare.

1550

I told you before and I'll tell you again: I'm old enough, as are a whole lot of other people in this chamber, to remember a time in our history, because it wasn't that long ago, when there wasn't a public health care system. It was well within the lifetime of most of the people in this chamber. Well, not these young pages. But I remember the time, and it wasn't that long ago in the total scheme of things, when once the supper table was cleared, moms and dads, folks, sat down at that kitchen table and in hushed tones debated about whether or not to take a sick kid to the doctor the next day, because doing so meant dipping into the mortgage money or the rent money or the grocery money or the utilities money. You had to weigh your ability to pay against the risk that you were prepared to take, and even the most caring and loving of parents made errors. Because families couldn't

afford to pay, kids didn't get taken to the doctor, and there were casualties. Kids died. Kids were crippled. Others in this chamber of my generation will remember some of those kids. They were our neighbours. By God, sometimes they were our sisters and brothers. Those were not the good old days.

I've witnessed generations of Ontarians like the Cruises working hard, making sacrifices and investments to build public health care, to expand it, to watch it and enable it and nurture it so that it grows. We shouldn't be having a debate about the Liberal government's privatization of critical health services; we should be having a debate about building public health care so that, for instance, we have a public pharmacy plan, we have pharmacare, so that people don't continue to get ripped off by the rich, profitable, multinational corporate pharmaceutical drug manufacturers.

The debate should be about building medicare, building public health care. We should be talking about taking the legacy that our parents left us in terms of medicare, in terms of public health care, and watching it grow with the addition of pharmacare, with the addition of dental care into our public health care system. Rather, this Liberal government, Dalton McGuinty and Ontario's Liberals, have more dramatically privatized health care than the Tories ever even dared attempt, think of, contemplate or propose.

This is a tragedy not just for the thousands and thousands of Ontario families that it punishes, but it's a tragedy because too many generations of Ontarians and other Canadians worked too hard for too long, sacrificed too much to build a public health care system, for us to destroy it now. Ontarians are angry. Ontarians hold this government in the highest of contempt and find it amazing that there's not one single backbencher among the 70-plus with the guts or the gonads to stand up and speak out on behalf of the people they represent. That's sad, that this Parliament is also failing the hard-working women and men of Ontario, their parents and their children.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): In commenting on the member for Niagara Centre, I still haven't got an answer from the member for Niagara Centre or from the other NDP members. Earlier this year, we had Bill 2, which rolled back the corporate tax cuts on big corporations by over $2 billion. The member for Niagara Centre and all his NDP mates voted with the Conservatives not to roll back the corporate tax cuts. Today he's singing a different tune.

About our budget, one thing we're doing is transforming health care to make sure that there are 9,000 additional cataract operations for seniors. We're making sure that 95,000 Ontarians now get home care who didn't get it before. That's what they're against. The NDP are against us increasing our contributions to nursing homes, $190 million to make sure we make the nursing homes the best possible.

We are also giving Ontario seniors of low and modest income who are 65 and over—they are tenants; they are homeowners—an extra $85 million to increase the Ontario property tax credit to $625 per household. That's another 33,000 households that are going to get the Ontario property tax credit. This is a huge investment in health care, unprecedented in transforming it, whether it be for home care or nursing care. We're uploading public health to the provincial government—they're against that; they want to keep it downloaded on the property taxes—to make sure we don't have another SARS outbreak.

They're about looking back in a rear-view mirror. We have to transform health care to protect public health care. The NDP just want to talk about it, but they never want to do anything about it. This budget finally does something to make health care for everyone worthwhile and to preserve it. They're always looking for things to criticize. They never mention the good, and there's a lot of good in this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. The member for Simcoe North.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to join the debate this afternoon on the budget motion, and I want to compliment the member from Niagara Centre on his speech. Once again, he's brought out a lot of very important points.

But I think what really is disappointing about this budget, more than anything else, is the fact that the citizens of Ontario didn't vote for a government that was going to deliver a budget like this. They looked at a plan that Mr McGuinty talked about over and over again in this House. As Leader of the Opposition, he had a plan for hard-working Ontario families, and of course that wasn't taking every penny out of their pockets. He never mentioned that one time. So the people of Ontario feel very, very betrayed with this budget.

That's the problem today. That's what's haunting Prime Minister Martin. I feel sorry for Mr Martin. He's away doing some business right now in Europe and with the G8 nations. He's got the G8 summit to attend. But the fact of the matter is, he's been dragged down severely, and the number one thing that has dragged down Paul Martin is Dalton McGuinty.

We hear it in the ridings. Maybe the Liberal members are hearing nothing but positive things, but I'll tell you, I attended three D-Day functions on the weekend alone, and the budget came up a minimum of probably 50 times during that time. I never initiated one of those discussions. I can tell you that the people of the province of Ontario are extremely disappointed; they're extremely betrayed. They feel betrayed by the antics of Mr McGuinty. "This is a broken promise"; that's all they talk about, and that is Mr McGuinty's legacy. The legacy of the Premier, Dalton McGuinty, is as the broken-promise Premier. That's what he'll go down as.

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm very pleased to comment on the debate and the comments that were raised by my colleague from Niagara Centre.

It's interesting that he put the budget within the context of one family in his riding and the tragedies that

they faced. I think it was very telling, because really this budget is a tragedy for the people of Ontario. It's a fiscal tragedy for the people of Ontario.

This government is, in its arrogance, lauding this budget as a positive thing. However, everyone I have spoken to in the riding of Hamilton East sees it as a tragic thing. They see it as a tragic thing because it goes back and hurts the most vulnerable people. It hurts the people who are least able to pay and hits them in the pocketbook to a point that they haven't seen in quite some time. People are being hurt by this budget.

The other big tragedy about it is the sheer arrogance of this government in refusing to recognize the pain that this budget is causing. It's a tragedy that this government thinks that everyone can pay, that everyone has the ability to pay. Quite frankly, that's not the case. That's not the case in the riding of Niagara Centre, as Mr Kormos raised. It's not the case in the riding of Hamilton East.

It's interesting, because I also attended many D-Day ceremonies yesterday in Hamilton, and I got the same response from person after person, senior after senior, family member after family member. They were outraged by the tragedy of this budget. They were outraged by the fact that when we were in a by-election in Hamilton East, people were saying, "We're hanging on by our fingernails." At that time, they were hanging on by their fingernails. Five days later, their fingers were cut off by this government. That's not acceptable, and I'll be pleased to be making more comments about this budget as time goes on.

1600

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to make a few comments on the presentation by the member from Niagara Centre, I believe it is. Regarding the letter that was just read from Tracey Cruise and the comments made that we don't care, I'm going to tell you that as Liberals we do care. That's why we put a budget in place that will put more nurses in our hospitals, that will put in more doctors, that will expand community health centres, that will look into what's needed in our schools.

As a retired educator, I saw the eight years of cuts and problems associated with the cuts to schools. I saw that. Having many family members in health care, I saw the problems related to health care. That's why, when it was time to make a decision on if I would run to represent my riding here at Queen's Park, I had no hesitation in believing that I could come here and make a difference. That's why, with this budget that we have, I know I can speak in support of what it talks about.

It does build on medicare, and it does give backbenchers—I heard here that backbenchers can't have a say. I believe in Tracey Cruise's letter. I've received letters. But you ought to know that I'm going to take those letters and I'm going to build on those, and our party will build on those letters and get the very best that we can get here in the province. I will stand up for the people in my riding.

It is not a budget that's hurting the province, it's a budget that's building for municipalities, it's building for hospitals, it's building for those nurses that I went to see last Friday, who heard that in my riding we are going to put in more full-time nurses.

So there are wonderful things in this budget, and I hope to have a chance to speak more on it later.

The Deputy Speaker: Reply?

Mr Kormos: Well, I say to the Liberals that their fundamental hurdle is one of credibility. There is a credibility gap that is canyonesque when it comes to Liberals. Look, nobody believes you any more. Maybe your mom does, but nobody else believes you. I hope your mom tells you she believes you because there's that special relationship, but even your mom knows that you're probably not going to keep that promise. But she wants to maintain a relationship with you because, after all, one's children are one's children. Nobody believes the Liberals any more, and nobody believes Mr McGuinty. The old joke is, how can you tell when a politician is—you know. Well, his or her lips are moving. It's an old joke, but it's acquired a whole new currency.

You see, New Democrats believe that maybe if we mobilize and if people mobilize and organize themselves, at the very least we can get this government, with enough pressure on and from backbenchers—because, look, you can criticize McGuinty all you want, but the fact is he can't do anything unless his backbenchers let him. And I want the government backbenchers to know that. Behind closed doors, they can mutter about, "Where the heck is McGuinty taking us with this wacko budget, especially the delisting, the privatization of health care and that health tax," but he won't do it and can't do it unless you let him. So that's why New Democrats and Howard Hampton are out there launching the campaign to get people riled up even more than they are now to stop the privatization of chiropractic, optometric and physiotherapy. Liberal backbenchers, you've got nothing to lose but your chains. Organize yourselves. Fight back. Join the people.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. Further debate?

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I would like to start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the Honourable Mary Anne Chambers, the member from Scarborough East, who is also the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

This is my first full speech in the House. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the residents of Scarborough Southwest for entrusting me with the privilege of electing me as their representative to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I'm humbled by this honour, and I will work to the best of my ability to ensure that their confidence in me is well placed.

As this is my maiden speech, I'd like to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about the riding of Scarborough Southwest. This riding has a long-standing tradition of electing representatives who have played a major role in shaping our province and our country, whether it be the late Honourable Martin O'Connell, a

cabinet minister and adviser to the late former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau; David Weatherhead, another federal Liberal member who became a mentor to me and is still involved in the riding; and others, such as former provincial New Democratic Party leader Stephen Lewis, Richard Johnston and former Ontario ministers Cindy Nicholas, Anne Swarbrick and even my predecessor, Dan Newman. They all serve to demonstrate the importance the residents of this riding have placed in their commitment and desire to work in the riding of Scarborough Southwest. I'm honoured to be following in their footsteps and will try to the best of my ability to do what is best for this community and this province.

I'd also like point out that a former member of this Legislature, Frank Faubert, who recently passed away, was also mayor of Scarborough and served well in this Legislature, as did David Warner, a former Speaker of this Legislature, who also represented a Scarborough riding.

I'd like to say a few words about the riding of Scarborough Southwest, which is located in the southeastern portion of Toronto, going as far west as Victoria Park and as far east as Scarborough Golf Club Road, north to Eglinton Avenue and south all the way to Lake Ontario.

The history of this riding can be seen going back to prehistoric ages when the Scarborough Bluffs were created. They're a tourist attraction to this day, and many people from across Toronto and even Ontario come to visit the Scarborough Bluffs.

I also want to point out that major roads, such as Kingston Road, travel through my riding. Kingston Road had a great history in the past, as it was a thriving cottage-country community where residents from across Toronto would come during the summertime and have their cottages. It was also a connecting road that led to Kingston, Ontario.

My riding has gone through dramatic changes since the end of the Second World War. Transforming itself from a tourist-farming community, it has become a modern urban setting made up of people from all parts of the world and from different walks of life.

I'd like to take this opportunity especially to acknowledge the many veterans from World War II who settled in my community, in the riding of Scarborough Southwest, after the war and have made Scarborough Southwest their home. I also want to commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day and the fact that so many fought to make Canada and Ontario what they are today.

The diversity of Scarborough Southwest has led to a beautiful tapestry of cultures that is evident by visiting the stores and plazas that are located on Kingston Road, Danforth Road, Eglinton Avenue and many other major streets that run through the area.

The evolution of my riding through the years has resulted in the creation of a number of community associations, which I would briefly like to acknowledge. Providence Centre, for example, is one of the largest homes for the aged in chronic care in Ontario. It's been there for many years and has provided service to many residents throughout my riding and Scarborough.

I'd also like to acknowledge other community centres and community facilities, such as Mid-Scarborough Community Centre, Warden Woods, Birchcliff and Oakridge. All these centres have served the community in different ways to bring together people from all these different cultural and social backgrounds to make Scarborough Southwest what it is today.

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I'd also like to point out that two city councillors, both Gerry Altobello and Brian Ashton from the city of Toronto, have worked closely with me in my new position, and in particular Councillor Altobello has been extremely instrumental in helping me to do my job not only as an MPP in my first early days but in my previous life as a city councillor, which dates back to the start in 1988, quite a few years ago.

In the last five minutes that I speak, I just want to talk a bit about the budget and why I chose to run for this position. I chose to run and seek election in this assembly because I saw, as a city councillor, the overall general decline in the quality of public services in Toronto and especially in the Scarborough area. I grew up in Scarborough. I was born just down the street here at Women's College Hospital and was raised at Ionview Public School and Winston Churchill Collegiate, which were both public schools in Scarborough.

As a city councillor, I witnessed the downloading that took place in the last eight years by the former government. They call it service realignment; I think it was downloading more than anything else. They created a new city of Toronto back in 1997 which had no rules and, really, no organization, except for 56 members and a mayor who had to try to create a new city of Toronto. There was no consultation when this occurred, and the result was that for the first several months, and perhaps the first several years, the city had to redefine itself. The city government had to redefine itself and create a government that is only now starting to work in the last few years.

I want to contrast that with what we did with our budget. The finance minister and the Premier moved immediately to consult with the community and with people right across Ontario to ensure that our budget would be one that was created through a consultation process. I think that's one of the key factors in this budget. The finance minister brought forward a budget last May that was the result of those consultations and the result of hearing from many stakeholders and also from simple people, simple Ontarians who came forward and had ideas as to how best to run Ontario.

Two of the key areas that came forward in the budget, two of the most important areas that came forward in the consultations, were health care and education. We've heard several times in this House already the fact that health care will increase, and our government will be spending a tremendous amount of additional money, including $2.2 billion in the upcoming fiscal year and an overall increase of $4.8 billion in the next four years. Several things will result from that, such as 8,000 new

nurses, 36,000 more heart procedures, 2,300 more joint replacements and 9,000 additional cataract surgeries.

Also, people who would otherwise go to the United States for cancer treatment and other services will hopefully be able to get their medical treatment here in Ontario. I think it's very important, and it's something that I heard from many residents when I knocked on doors throughout the campaign.

Secondly, I want to talk briefly about education. One of the first acts that this government undertook was the passage of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which rejected the idea of private schools and invested in public schools. As I said earlier, I attended public schools here in Toronto, from kindergarten right until grade 13. They were first-class institutions at that time. I heard during the campaign of the deterioration in those institutions, and as a new member of this government, I am hopeful that, with the budget and the implementation of the many different recommendations that the budget speaks to, we'll see the public school service that this province and the residents and students deserve to see.

Finally, in the remaining minute that I have, I want to speak a little bit about what this budget does for our cities. For the first time, we've heard the word "uploading" in this Legislature—at least I have. Previously, the former government downloaded services on to us, whether it be social housing, other types of services, transportation, TTC. They were downloaded, as well as public health, on to the cities. In this budget, and which members of the opposition failed to speak about, is the fact that we brought in a gas tax sharing of two cents per litre, which will tremendously help the new city of Toronto and all the other municipalities across Ontario, with a good chunk of money that's needed to help run the city.

We've also uploaded to 75% public health services. This is a tremendous relief for cities. I've spoken to many councillors, like the ones I mentioned earlier, as well as to our mayor, David Miller, whom I know quite well.

So the budget has done a great deal of things. I could go on longer and speak about it; however, my time is limited. I want to say that I fully support this budget. I first got elected to city council. I ran for this position as an MPP because I truly believe that what Dalton McGuinty and this government are trying to do is in the best interests of the people of Ontario.

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I rise to contribute to the consideration of our government's first budget. Let me first share with you an experience I had just last Saturday, when I visited my 92-year-old mom, who lives in a long-term-care facility in Scarborough. It's a very pleasant facility with really dedicated, hard-working staff. I have felt that my mom is very well cared for there.

But last Saturday afternoon she was particularly cheerful. She told me that she was feeling, in her own words, "Absolutely wonderful." She told me that she had just been given a bath, and she felt refreshed and stimulated, in her words, "from her head to her toes."

I had taken her dinner, a special treat. She ate with such enthusiasm and satisfaction that I sat and simply watched with a sense of relief and pleasure. She told me that she knew she would sleep soundly that night because she felt so good. I asked her to tell me her secret for feeling so wonderful. She told me it was the bath that had made her feel so good.

My mom has been having this simple, yet wonderful, of course healthy, experience only once per week. But with the respect and attention that our government is committing to our seniors, residents of long-term-care facilities will be able to enjoy this simple but important pleasure twice, not once, per week. This is one small and personal illustration of our government's focus on better health care.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank our nurses, personal support workers, physicians and other health care providers who each and every day take care of those who are not able to care for themselves any more.

A large number of Ontarians will be needing the help of others to get them through each day simply because they are aging. They have previously cared for themselves, their children, their grandchildren and perhaps great-grandchildren. They have contributed to the well-being of others, sometimes strangers, during their younger years and it is time that their government takes the necessary steps to ensure that they are treated with the dignity they deserve. That is what our government has committed to do.

Because our government is committed to providing medically necessary health care to the people of Ontario, the budget will invest in initiatives that will also shorten wait times for surgical procedures, increase the number of doctors and nurses, deliver free immunizations for children and increase funding for care delivered in hospitals, long-term-care facilities and at home, for those still able to live in their own homes.

I strongly believe the role of government is to take care of those who need the assistance or attention of others, whether temporarily or systemically. Philosophers have referred to this as serving the public good, the common good.

By investing in a stronger public education system, our government is honouring its commitment to ensuring that Ontario's students have the required foundation for academic and social achievement. Our initiatives in education will include smaller classes for younger students, greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy, more help for students at risk, and increased opportunities for students to excel in their particular areas of ability and interest, opportunities like apprenticeships and co-op work programs, so that our province will benefit not only by successfully engaging our youth in learning that excites them, but also by helping our young people to acquire skills that are desperately needed in Ontario's workplaces.

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I would like to thank our teachers and all who are involved in the education of our young people. I would

argue that there are no other professionals who shape the future of our citizens to the extent that our teachers do.

I am proud that our government has focused its attention on the need for social responsibility, even as it quite correctly has committed to stemming the structural decline of our province's finances. I ran for political office as a Liberal because it is a basic Liberal value that government must ensure the existence of a civil society by taking responsibility for the needs of the people we are elected to serve in a manner that is both socially and fiscally responsible. That responsibility in any civil society must be shared by all citizens, with government being stewards of the people's priorities and the allocation of funding to meet those priorities.

In our budget, we are asking the people of Ontario to work with us to ensure that essential public services like health care and education can be strengthened in order to ensure that our province is as strong and as civil as it can possibly be. The Premier often tells us that we are stronger when we work together. Many of us were taught that we are indeed our brother's keeper. The people of Ontario will be the beneficiaries of these improvements in our public services. Indeed, it is because our government is fully committed to the highest quality of life for the people of Ontario that our first budget reflects the steps required to ensure that our agenda for prosperity can be achieved. Yes, difficult decisions have had to be made. We have asked the people of Ontario to share the cost of those decisions because they will also share the positive outcomes of the investments that are being made in our province.

Mr Speaker, please let me take this opportunity to thank the residents of Scarborough East for giving me the privilege of representing their interests here in the Legislature, in my work as their member of provincial Parliament and as the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for Ontario. It is a privilege that I do not ignore, a privilege that I truly am humbled by.

When I speak with the residents of Scarborough East about the tough decisions we have had to make and the reasons why we have had to make these decisions, they may not be entirely thrilled, but they understand that we have come from an era that has cost our public services more than they had anticipated, and it is now time to correct that.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Dunlop: I'd like to comment and to congratulate the member from Scarborough Southwest on his maiden speech, although I thought I heard him up here criticizing me a few times in Qs and As and I thought he had already made his maiden speech; I thought he did a fairly good job of his criticism, anyhow—and also the member for Scarborough East on her fine comments.

As we continue with this budget motion, the concern we have on this side of the House is what we're hearing from our constituents. The member for Scarborough East mentioned how proud she was to represent the folks who sent her to Queen's Park back on October 2. I, too, am very proud of the fact that I represent the beautiful riding of Simcoe North.

In my riding, I'm at a lot of events, particularly on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Even early this morning, I was at an event. The word out there is "promise breakers" and the betrayal of the taxpayers. That's what we're hearing, and I think we're going to see it on June 28 when the federal election is held. I think there will be a lot of disappointed Liberals, particularly here in Ontario, and a lot of people are saying it's because of McGuinty. That's what we're hearing over and over again.

People expect a government to keep the bulk of their thoughts, the bulk of their promises. When they campaign on a platform, they expect ~~that,~~ if they're elected, that's the type of thing that will come out. We've really seen a reversal of that, and this budget has topped it all off. I think when we started out with the hydro capping, that was the initial shock that taxpayers really worried about last fall, and now, with the budget, they're very concerned and very disappointed.

Mr Kormos: As I indicated earlier, this is a time-allocated debate. It will end at 10 to 6 this afternoon. Fortunately, we'll have a chance to hear from the new member for Hamilton East, Andrea Horwath, in around 32 minutes' time. So I encourage folks who are fans of Andrea's, like I am, to stay tuned and keep their hand off the clicker. Andrea Horwath is going to be speaking, utilizing her 20-minute slot.

I'm excited about this. She was just sworn in last Monday, sat for the first time last Monday, and I've got to tell you, it's as if she has been here for years. She has entrenched herself in the culture of Queen's Park very effectively, very readily. So I'm excited about what I suppose will constitute her first speech in the Legislature—her first speech. I think we have to be careful about how we refer to these things and in terms of what language that could be archaic may imply about certain things. This is going to be a speech to look forward to. So as I say, I'm sitting here on the edge of my seat, anticipating an exciting address by Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East.

She knows her stuff; make no mistake about it. She knows her community; make no mistake about that. She knows what people are thinking. Andrea Horwath knows that nobody believes the Liberals any more, because she spent the weekend back in her riding just like every member of this Legislature spent the weekend back in his or her riding across Ontario, being told time after time that, "We just can't trust the Liberals. How do we know they're"—you know what I'm saying, because their lips are moving. That's how you know. Their lips are moving.

Andrea Horwath, 32 minutes; keep an eye.

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I'm very much pleased to join the debate on this Budget Measures Act. This government's plan is a four-year plan. It's a plan to deliver the real, positive change that Ontarians voted for last October. This is a plan that is going to deliver free vaccinations for our children against chicken pox. This is a plan to deliver free vaccin-

ations against diseases like pneumonia and meningitis. These are diseases that have been killing Ontario children for a long time. Our government made a promise to look after our children in this province. That is why this budget plan is going to deliver free vaccinations to our children against chicken pox, meningitis, as well as pneumonia.

As you know, I'm a family doctor turned politician. I look at this plan as a very positive plan. This budget, if passed, would deliver changes reducing waiting times in our emergencies. It will help us to reduce waiting times for hip surgeries and cancer care.

The people of Ontario told us that they wanted reduced times for hip surgeries, cataracts, as well as radiotherapy for cancer treatment. I am for this budget. I support this budget. It's a very good four-year plan.

1630

The Deputy Speaker: Reply? The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr Berardinetti: On behalf of my colleague for Scarborough East, Mary Anne Chambers, I wanted to thank the members from Simcoe North, Niagara Centre and Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale for providing comments on our speeches. Once again, I think the key to this budget is the fact that we're able to debate the budget, spend the next several days—I know that the member from Niagara Centre mentioned that this is a time-allocated motion or period, but there is time to discuss the contents of the budget over the next little while. I look forward to that debate.

The key will be four years from now, because this is a four-year plan. Four years from now the key question will be, are we better off as a province? Are the residents of Ontario better off four years from now than they were today? That will not be answered until four years from now.

I also want to say again that those who have put their names on the front line here, especially the finance minister and the Premier, have taken a great risk. I took a lot of English courses when I was in university and I like to read a lot. There's a little quote I just wanted to put into the record that reads as follows: "Great spirits have always found violent opposition from mediocrities. The latter cannot understand it when man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence." That quote is attributed to Albert Einstein. I'm not surprised that there's violent opposition and all sorts of criticism of the budget today, but I truly believe that our Premier and the finance minister, our cabinet and all the Liberal members here are doing what is courageous, honest, intelligent and in the best interests of the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Barrie-Bradford-Simcoe.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Mr Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford. I just twisted them around today.

Mr Tascona: I'm certainly pleased to join in the debate with respect to the 2004 Ontario budget. This government, I would say, is taking the province of Ontario back in time to the days of high government spending, waste, tax increases and poor-performing economies. There is no doubt that this budget is viewed as a tax-and-spend budget. I think that's what has got Ontarians very upset with respect to what they expected from this government when they were running for the election.

They weren't running on a tax-and-spend budget; they were running on keeping the status quo. Nothing was going to be changed. I don't think the test is, as the member across the way said, "Will you be better off four years from now?" The test right now is, are you better off now?

The bottom line is, with a budget that contains over 50 separate tax or fee increases, I hardly think we're better off now. The comments I've received in my riding are, "The government, all they're after is getting at our wallets. They're going after us and they're taking our money." They're not convinced that this is a budget that is in the best interests of Ontarians.

So it makes the people of Ontario pay for health care with the new tax, or premium, as they like to call it, that will cost middle-income earners and working families, at minimum, $300 and, at maximum, $900 more a year. This is the same OHIP premium that was eliminated in 1989 by the Peterson Liberal government for one very fundamental reason: They didn't feel it was fair. They also didn't want people to have to pay for their health care, and that's what has happened now. People are now paying for their health care because of this new OHIP premium, or tax, as we would call it.

So are people better off right now with respect to their health care system by now being required to pay a tax? It's going to come off your taxes because it's going to be a payroll tax. I hardly think people feel they're better off by having to pay an OHIP premium, especially when they were told that would not happen. There was no discussion on OHIP premiums. In fact, they were told very clearly, the Premier committed in writing that there would be no tax increases and that he would commit to the taxpayer referendum legislation. In fact, what we have here is a tax increase, but no referendum. What the Premier is doing, and it's set out in the budget bill, is he is going to change the Taxpayer Protection Act to ensure that these OHIP premiums can be put forth. So what he's doing is changing the law, changing his obligations, changing what he put in writing with respect to what he was going to do during the election.

And that's what has got people mad. They voted with respect to the representation from this government that there would not be any tax increases. They voted that there wasn't going to be a fundamental change to the health care system where they would have to pay for it. They voted because they felt that the message they were being given was a message they thought they could rely on. And now to their shock, with all the promises that have been broken—I think we're counting up to 31 broken promises to date—what they're seeing is a gov-

ernment that does not live up to its word. Quite frankly, what I can hear when I'm at the door during this federal election is that the Liberal brand has been ruined, and whatever brand that was, people feel that the Liberals are not keeping their word and cannot be trusted. That's the brand that they're going to have to wear.

While people are paying this huge tax for health care, they're losing health care services that were covered before by OHIP. So they're paying more for less, such as free eye exams, chiropractic services and physiotherapy. I've heard a lot of it in my riding with respect to this delisting of services. It's not being received well. I think what you're seeing is a groundswell with respect to people just realizing what's going to happen. The reality of this province now is that you have to pay for your health care, in terms of fundamental services, eye exams, chiropractic services and physiotherapy, especially the age group that would need that, which is the group that is aging, 50 and above. They're going to be paying for these services when they would have expected that they would have been covered because they're necessary. What that means is that it's going to put greater pressure on the OHIP system because of the fact that these services are not going to be covered. So in effect, you're now going to have to pay directly for private services for eye exams, chiropractic services and physiotherapy. Now we have private services that are provided out there that you have to pay for out of your pocket. Before, you didn't have to. How is OHIP improved by individuals having to pay for their health care and also having to pay for services that were previously provided by OHIP? What we have is more taxes and less services.

I saw in the paper the other day that the Minister of Finance—the one responsible, alongside the Premier, for this disastrous budget—said he hadn't run into people who were upset about this budget. He went on to say that the people of Ontario understood why this government did what they did. I guess that is why they are running ads right now trying to undo the damage they have caused. I think everybody has heard those ads being run by the Liberal Party, in the voice messaging of the Premier, with respect to how their health care system is going to be improved by paying for it.

1640

Anyway, I'm not sure where the finance minister has been in Ontario, but I'm going to read you some of the feedback I've received from my constituents on this budget. I want to stress that these are just a small sample of the anger and dismay that taxpayers in my riding are expressing to me.

Shirley McGill says, "I make $32,000 a year and I may be forced to sell my house because of this budget."

From Peter Lewis-Watts in Barrie: "You have now given me, my neighbourhood and the people of Ontario ample evidence that the Liberal Party is totally unfit to govern this province."

Here's another, from Terah Sherwood, a single mother in my riding, who says, "I do not think that these cuts were well thought out and the devastation that they will cause for low-income families will be tremendous."

I could go on, but I don't have enough time on the clock to go through the number of constituents who are expressing their outrage in my riding with respect to this budget.

At this time I want to talk about the fact that there was no mention of capital funding for a cancer care centre in this budget for the Royal Victoria Hospital in my riding. The entire community has been waiting for this cancer care centre. The present cancer care unit at RVH is, and has been for some time now, overwhelmed. I am of the mindset that patients deserve to have these services provided closer to home—these are radiation services—and in a manner that is as efficient and comfortable as possible.

I was at an event there last night, where Ted Long spoke with respect to the cancer care centre. We already provide chemotherapy at the RVH. There has been an expansion of that but there are tremendous numbers of constituents—and we don't just serve the people of Barrie; it goes all the way up to Parry Sound—who are afflicted with cancer who need radiation therapy, and the list is growing. They are hopeful—and certainly Minister of Health Smitherman—of having this cancer care facility up and running by 2006, and I'm hopeful of that too. But I would like to see it operational even sooner than that because the need is there. The people in my riding shouldn't have to go down to Sunnybrook hospital or Toronto, with their families being totally upset in terms of getting this fundamental service.

That's something I was proud about, our government, where we brought a lot of these services closer to home: the MRI service, kidney dialysis, and increased cancer care treatment with respect to chemotherapy, just to name a few in terms of closer-to-home services. If anything is more fundamental in terms of people needing a service such as cancer care, that is it with respect to the cancer care unit that should be provided at RVH.

The same goes for Southlake Regional Health Centre and their plans for building a cancer care centre. Now they're providing cardiac care services, which is a good example, that you need to have those services closer to home, and you can get those from within my riding, which is in the Bradford and Newmarket area where Southlake provides their services for cardiac care, and all the way up to Barrie, which is a great improvement in terms of having to go all the way down to Toronto to get those fundamental services for cardiac care.

The Royal Victoria Hospital and the Southlake Regional Health Centre, alongside the entire community, have been pushing for funding so that these cancer care centres can become a reality. The Royal Victoria Hospital in my riding of Barrie needs this centre, and it needed it yesterday. But this budget provides no capital funding or operating fund for this centre. Instead, it delists health care services for people in my riding.

I also see that this government in this budget did not supply any money for the children's treatment centre in my riding. I notice that the Minister of Children's Services was here. She has been trying to be responsive

with respect to this issue, but the fact of the matter is, and I've mentioned this several times before, that Simcoe county and York region are the only areas left in the entire province that do not have access to children's treatment centre services in their own areas. Quite frankly, that is just ridiculous.

This funding was also needed yesterday in order for children and their families to get the core rehabilitation services they need and deserve delivered in Simcoe county and York region. But the money for this is also not in the budget. Instead, we see a health tax slapped on to Ontarians, with working families being hit the hardest.

As I mentioned earlier in the debate, there are about 50 tax and fee increases. We're going to see a tax increase, the income tax user fee with respect to OHIP premiums. It's estimated that it will cost $2.8 billion for the full year, which the public is going to pay out of after-tax dollars for health care. All that money comes out of the economy, and the less money that is in the economy, the greater effect you have with respect to maintaining a strong economy.

We also have the hydro tax of $3.9 billion; a cigarette tax of $150 million, estimated for the full year at $200 million; an Ontario wine cooler tax, $150 million, and the beer tax, an increase of 45 cents per case; the Hydro One increase of over $150 million; and the driver's licence tax, with an increase of $50 to $75.

I can tell you, coming from an area where people commute, and I imagine there are a number of members who have commuting ridings, with the price of gasoline at the pump—last year at this time it was 62 cents per litre and now it's running between 80 and 95 cents per litre in some areas—that's a tremendous increase to their pocketbook. Certainly it's going to have a tremendous increase on the economy, and it's already being noticed. I believe Jeff Rubin, of one of the big banks, indicated that the reality will set in in about five months with respect to people realizing that high gas prices are here to stay. We know that insurance rates to drive an automobile have increased substantially, despite the promise by the government to bring those rates down. And now we see them slapping a driver's licence tax increase on people who want to drive their automobiles. So the cost to drive an automobile is increasing in the thousands of dollars.

I want to put a plug in for my bill this Thursday. Bill 48, with respect to the price freeze, which I brought in in early April to freeze the price of gas at 74 cents per litre, is up for second reading this Thursday. I can tell you it's very important that this government take action with respect to providing some leadership and direction with respect to dealing with gas prices.

I know the Speaker himself has brought forth a bill with respect to notice, which I think didn't receive adoption in Nova Scotia—I don't think it made it out there. But he's put forth a private member's bill to require notice before you increase the rates.

The bottom line with respect to gasoline pricing is it's very important that the government take its role seriously, because they have jurisdiction to set the price, they have jurisdiction to deal with this.

There are people talking about the price of gasoline up north being about $1.40 per litre later this month. I can tell you that my bill will cover this off in terms of price instability. I know in my riding it has ranged from 74 cents in early April to as high as 95 cents a couple of weeks ago, just a tremendous increase. I can tell you it does not bode well for the economy. The only ones that are going to benefit from price instability are the big oil companies. We can just imagine what their bottom line is going to look like in a couple of months. They will have fantastic profits for the first quarter of 2004, without any question.

The budget itself also eliminates the following tax incentives, and I want to go through them:

It eliminates the workplace accessibility tax incentive. It eliminates the workplace child care tax incentive. It eliminates the graduate transitions tax credit. It eliminates the education technology tax incentive. It eliminates the RST rebate for vehicles purchased to transport persons with permanent physical disability. It eliminates the Ontario home ownership savings plan. It eliminates the Ontario research employee stock option credit. It eliminates the tax incentive for electricity supply and conservation. It eliminates the employer health tax exemption on stock options paid to employers for research incentive companies, and it eliminates the U-turn on corporate tax cut capital. That's just to name a number of measures they took with respect to eliminating tax and adding user fees to this particular budget.

1650

Looking at this budget also in terms of law and order, this Liberal government made a commitment to the people of Ontario to hire 1,000 new police officers for community policing in Ontario. Now Liberals are breaking faith with the people of Ontario by failing to mention this commitment in the budget. In addition, there is no mention of the 100 new probation/parole officers they promised the people of Ontario to make our communities safer. This new budget confirms that this Liberal government is soft on crime. The Liberals are fostering a breeding ground for criminals, organized gangs and thugs, while putting every law-abiding Ontarian at risk. They certainly have not put law and order in any area on the radar screen in terms of dealing with the situation in this province.

But the fundamental thing is that the Liberals said during the campaign—and this is why their federal cousins are being punished at the door and are going to be punished on June 28—they would not raise taxes, they would not impose user fees or run a deficit. So much for that. They are not only doing that, they are raising taxes, we are paying for our health care, and they are adding user fees with respect to how much it costs for your vehicle and in terms of spirits, wines and cigarettes.

The bottom line is that this budget raises the people of Ontario's taxes to the tune of $9.7 billion and at the same time reduces services. It allows the McGuinty government to run a $6.1-billion deficit and adds $12 billion to the provincial debt without finding any real savings. It

breaks more promises, promises that were made to the people of this province just seven short months ago.

I noticed an Ipsos-Reid poll on the weekend with respect to what the public thinks of that budget and what they think of the provincial Liberal government now. Their approval rating has decreased to 34%. The view of the public with respect to whether Mr McGuinty is doing a good job is down to 9%.

Mr Kormos: It's single digit.

Mr Tascona: The member from Welland is correct: It is single digit. And I can tell—

Mr Kormos: With a margin of error of four, it could be zero.

Mr Tascona: Let's not get that carried away. But I'll tell you this: It breaks more promises, promises that were just made to people during the election. That's the problem here. That's why the Liberal brand is going to be affected, because of the promises. People expect you to live up to your word. That's where your credibility is. If you don't have credibility, what you say you're going to do during the election, you get in and you do other things. Political credibility is something that you cannot just fool around with, and that's what the Premier has been doing. I remember the comment by the Minister of Finance the day after the budget. He said, "Well, that was yesterday," in terms of the questions he was asked. Well, today is today, and the people are still dissatisfied.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired, so we will have questions and comments.

Ms Horwath: I'm pleased to comment on the speech of the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford. The comments he makes are reflective of the comments that I've been hearing, certainly in Hamilton East. It really is about the total shock, I think, and total disbelief, generally, of the public in this government and the fact that the number of promises that were broken so soon after the election last October is unbelievable. It's unbelievable to people that this government has gone back on its word on so many things. The level of tax increases is unbelievable, particularly the ones foisted on those least able to pay.

The lack of leadership that this government is showing and the lack of understanding that it's showing for the residents of this province is enormous. It all culminates around the increased taxes in health care and the delisting of services in health care. That's the lightening rod for people's anger, and that's where people have really lost all faith in the ability of this government to do the right thing by the people of Ontario.

The government keeps saying, "Trust us; we need to make these difficult decisions," but they are not listening to the people of the province. They didn't listen when they were going door to door back in September and October. Certainly I was listening not too long ago. People were telling me they are extremely angry, and that was even before the budget came down. This past weekend I had the opportunity to talk to many people, and they are reeling in anger and disbelief over the broken promises of this government, the increased taxes and the sheer arrogance that this government refuses to hear what the people of this province are still saying in regard to the budget. It's a fiasco, and I'm glad the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford had a chance to raise the issues he did.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): The budget that was presented to this House is a budget that tried to deal with the reality that was faced at the time and the commitment to the people of Ontario that we would restore health care and education.

Unfortunately, the information that was provided by the governing Tories at the time was information that did not give all of the facts. It was very selective. It was selective, because what it did was purport that the fiscal health of this province was very good. In fact, between 2000-01 and 2003-04, the spending of this province increased by 22%, far exceeding the tax revenues, which in that same time declined by 0.6%. The government of the day is the one that holds the facts. They hold the information. If they choose to provide selective information to the people of Ontario and to the opposition members, then you are dealing with—let's put it this way: It isn't an exact accounting of the state of the finances of the province.

Considering those actions of that government, I believe this budget is a beginning of restoring both fiscal health as well as our core services to the people of Ontario.

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise to comment on the speech of my colleague from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford. I want to bring out a couple of quick points. Mr Tascona continues to talk about and lobby for two major health care facilities in Simcoe county, one being the expansion of the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie and bringing a cancer care unit to the city of Barrie and Simcoe county, as well as the children's treatment centre. I commend him for that. I know that a number of residents in my riding use the Royal Victoria Hospital as their principal hospital. As he pointed out, York region and the county of Simcoe are the only areas of the province that don't have a children's treatment centre. There's a fantastic proposal before the Minister of Children's Services, and I fully expect that with the huge increase in spending, that is something that should be announced very quickly.

I also wanted to commend the member from Hamilton East on her election. I know she will be speaking in a few moments. I think her election said a lot. Only seven months after Dalton McGuinty was sworn into office, even prior to the budget, he loses a by-election. I don't think that's ever been done that quickly before, particularly before a budget. Obviously she's a good candidate and she will be an excellent member of this Legislature. However, that said it all. That's the credibility, where Mr McGuinty has taken this government. As I said in an earlier comment, his legacy will be the Premier of broken promises.

1700

Mr Kormos: I say to the Liberals, yeah, you're right. This province is in a financial crisis. It needs the revenues. Then why did you give a billion-dollar tax cut to the profitable banks and insurance companies? What's

the matter with you guys? Give your head a shake. You give a tax cut, a billion-dollar tax cut, to the banks and the insurance companies, then you tell single moms working at two and three jobs, like the kind of single moms I know where I come from, that they've got to pay a new tax that amounts to a 24% increase in their income taxes. What planet are you guys on?

We know how you got elected. You said anything you had to to get elected, and you did. Whether you believed it or not, whether you intended to do it or not, you said anything you had to to get elected. Then once you're elected, you don't feel any obligation to keep any of your promises. Well, it would be unparliamentary for me to tell you what we call that down where I come from in Niagara Centre. Liberals give billion-dollar tax cuts to banks and impose new taxes on the lowest-income people, the hardest-working folks in this province. That's nuts.

I'm so glad that in two minutes' time we're going to be hearing from Andrea Horwath. You know her. She's the candidate who got elected down there in Hamilton East; the NDP candidate and former city councillor. You've heard about her. You've heard people talking about her. You've read about her in major Toronto newspapers, as well as in the Hamilton Spectator. This is going to be her premiere, debut speech, in two minutes' time here at Queen's Park. I encourage folks to stay tuned, listen to what Andrea Horwath has to say in what will be a historic debut, premiere speech by this bright, capable, young new member of provincial Parliament.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford has two minutes to reply.

Mr Tascona: I'm very pleased to respond in debate to the members from Hamilton East, Sarnia-Lambton, Simcoe North and, of course, Niagara Centre. I think the theme through here, as the member of Hamilton East stated, is the refusal to hear and, I would add, the refusal to abide by the law.

The law is very clear with respect to where you increase taxes in contradiction of the Taxpayer Protection Act. The fact that the Premier signed that document and the fact that he said he would not increase our taxes over and over again leads to the anger and the disbelief when you see a tax increase with respect to OHIP premiums. I don't think anybody would have seen that on the radar screen, other than the Minister of Finance and whoever is advising him.

But the fact of the matter is that the Liberals keep talking about, "Well, we just didn't know what was going on." Well, what do you think we do in this House? We have the public accounts committee, we have estimates; we have information. The fact of the matter is, the government got elected six months into the fiscal year. They're trying to make it look like, "Oh, we just got in there and we had to deliver a budget."

The bottom line is that you are making the people of this province pay for the promises you have broken. Political credibility is what this is all about. Whether you like it or not, you got elected on a platform that you said you were going to abide by. I can't believe that your political credibility has been lost within the first eight months of your mandate. Because it has been lost. Quite frankly, what I'm hearing out there on the campaign for the federal election is that the Liberal brand can't be trusted and they need to be taught a lesson.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Horwath: I first want to take an opportunity to thank all of the people in Hamilton East who gave me the honour to be here and, after having only been sworn in a week ago, having the opportunity to participate in this budget debate. It truly is an honour for me to be able to do that, and I want to thank them for putting their confidence in me. They had a lot to say as I was walking through the neighbourhoods and the streets of Hamilton East. People had some very serious concerns and very serious issues, and they do need to be thanked and I want to do that: thank them for sharing their concerns with me and thank them, really, for putting their trust in me to be able to bring their voice to this venerable building and this venerable forum.

I also want to thank the people who helped bring the message from myself and the New Democratic Party to the voters of Hamilton East: the volunteers who helped on that campaign, worked hours and hours and hours; the activists; the full-time workers who took time off work to be there; my family, who participated in many, many ways, particularly in supporting me in the times that I was spending door-to-door, day after day; the ordinary people who decided for the first time to come out and volunteer on an election campaign. It was wonderful to see. There were hundreds and hundreds of people there. We had a number of people from diverse communities who came to work on the campaign. We had a number of people from the Sikh community, from the Muslim community, the labour movement, the environmental movement—people from all over. They came because they were really concerned about the direction that they saw this province going in. They came because they all unified behind a message that needed to be sent to the government.

The funny thing about it is that the voice I bring is following in the footsteps of a member who spoke on behalf of the vulnerable people in Hamilton East, the people who had the least amount of voice, the people who are in fact going to be hurt the most by this budget. I'm very, very proud and honoured to be able to have the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of someone like Dominic Agostino. Although we're from different parties, we recognize that the people of Hamilton East are working people; they are low-income people, moderate-income people. They are people who cannot afford the kind of tax increases that this budget brings to the Ontarians in Hamilton East and to all of Ontario. I can tell you that even though we were from different parties, I spent a lot of time on different issues with Dominic over the years. Prior to even being elected to city council, I worked at a community legal clinic and I was a social justice activist at the time. I was organizing low-income people, organizing workers who were

injured on the job, organizing tenants, organizing single moms on FBA, working with them for legislative change. And he did some great work.

I have to say that I'm very proud to be here and to take up that cause, because it's even more important. It's more important because the government of the day is not listening to those people any more. Those people had great hope, I believe, back in October. The people of Hamilton East had great hope, and that hope dwindled in a matter of a few short months after this government was elected. It dwindled because they felt the government was arrogant and not listening to what they had to say. They were worried—and rightfully so—that a budget was going to come down that was going to hurt them.

Unfortunately, I'm here to tell you that that's exactly what happened and that's exactly how they are feeling. They are feeling betrayed, they're feeling angry, but most of all, they're feeling afraid. They're feeling afraid for their future, because they have been hanging on by their fingernails for a very, very long time, and they were hoping that with a change in government, they would see a change in their quality of life for the better. What I'm hearing is, they're very fearful that the quality of their life is simply going to continue to degrade, particularly if this government doesn't stop and take a look at the mistakes they've made and reconsider some of the measures that have been brought forward in this budget.

This budget is a tax on low- and moderate-income people. It's a plethora of charges and fees and taxes that people simply cannot afford. To add insult to injury, it's a regressive budget that takes us back in time in regard to health care coverage. The delisting of services like chiropractic, physiotherapy, optometry services: These things are the things for which people are going to have to pay more of their money out of their pocket.

Interestingly enough, that very question was put to the Premier earlier today and he laughed it off. It's not a funny thing. He laughed it off saying it will only be a couple of hundred dollars. Well, if you add that couple of hundred dollars to the couple of hundred dollars of extra user fees people are going to have to pay, to the couple of hundred dollars—sometimes over a thousand dollars—of extra OHIP premiums people are going to have to pay, and you can tell very quickly that low- and moderate-income working families in Hamilton East are going to have a very difficult time making ends meet, because every bit adds up and every bit counts. It may not count for the Premier, but it does count for the average working person and family.

1710

It's kind of a discriminatory budget, really. I found out recently, to my chagrin, that a person my age is going to have to start wearing eyeglasses pretty soon. Fortunately I don't have to wear them yet, but apparently, when you get around my age, your eyes start to deteriorate. So I expect very soon that I'm going to have to see an optometrist and have that issue dealt with; I'm in that catchment area. Luckily, I'm in a position where perhaps I can afford to pay that fee. But I know hundreds and thousands of people—I knocked on their doors very recently and talked to them face-to-face—and they can't afford it. Those are the same people who can't afford dental care right now, because they have jobs where there's no health coverage. So they're having problems with their teeth, and now they're going to have problems with their eyes. We expect them to undertake lifelong learning, get better jobs and all these things we talk about—how we encourage people to move forward in their lives—yet all the things this budget does simply take them down a peg, and down a peg and down a peg until they have no hope left.

When you look at some of the things I had hoped myself—as somebody who has lived in Hamilton all my life and advocated in areas of social justice for many years, I had some hopes myself about what this budget might bring. I actually listened to the government during the election, when they were simply another party running for election back in September and October. I had some great hopes, quite frankly, that we would see some major changes in some of the areas I feel passionate about personally, and some of the areas that I know would make a huge difference in the quality of life of hundreds of people in Hamilton East. But I didn't see the kinds of things I was hoping to see. In fact, I'm extremely disappointed.

When you look at basic things that we know would make a huge difference in communities, like affordable housing—nothing, a pittance toward affordable housing. The federal government is putting millions of dollars into affordable housing. This government is not following that lead. This government is not going to scratch the surface of the need for affordable housing in communities across the province. In fact, the estimates I've received indicate that approximately 500 to 550 units will be able to be built with the dollars committed by this government. The city of Hamilton alone has determined that just to meet the existing need we would have to build 700 units a year for at least five years just to deal with the waiting list we have right now. How 520 units across the province are going to scratch the surface of affordable housing needs is beyond me.

Another one that was a shock to me, quite frankly, is the fact that this government decided not to return the money to parents on FBA. That the FBA clawback instituted by the previous government was not fully repealed was a shocker to me. It's really a frightening thing. We did a consultation in Hamilton in regard to this issue. In Hamilton, we, as a city, chose to use the FBA clawback funding that was funnelled to us through the previous government to develop programs and unique opportunities for people to find supports that could help them in regard to getting back to work, child care and various other kinds of things.

The consultation indicated, interestingly enough, that most people in the consultation generally felt the FBA money should really go directly to the people who needed it, directly to those people the money was clawed back from. Interestingly enough, the actual recipients, or the potential recipients, the people who were actually to

receive the dollars, the people who were the poorest of the people being consulted, said, "If the money gets shared around a little bit, we understand that, but, really, it is our money and we do need to have that money back." The bottom line is, these are very low-income people. These are families that could use that funding to provide a decent—or at least a more decent—quality of life for their families and kids, and this government decided not to pass that money on to the people who deserve it. That's really a tragedy.

There's a lot more in this budget that was a shock to me. I've got lists and lists here, and I'll continue to discuss them.

For example, when you look at the OHIP premiums themselves and where we ended up with that, I was personally quite shocked. First of all, the whole principle, the whole idea, the whole aspect of bringing OHIP premiums back was something that just floored people. There were rumours around that that was going to happen, and I was laughing. I kept thinking, "No way. They're never going to do that. They wouldn't do that. That's crazy." Well, you know what? It is crazy. We're living that insanity, and it's just wrong.

It's $300 for individuals who are earning between $20,000 and $36,000. Do you know what it's like to live on between $20,000 and $36,000? It's not an easy row to hoe. It is a very difficult standard of living. People earning between $20,000 and $36,000 are not living high on the hog. They're eking out a meagre existence, especially with rents the way they are and taxes the way they are after downloading. Particularly in the city of Hamilton, I can tell you, it's been very difficult.

But for an individual earning $200,000, it's only $750. That's where the injustice of this OHIP premium comes in. At $25,000, the surtax is 1.2% of a person's income. At $70,000, the surtax is 0.86%. Jeez, it's going down. At $100,000, the surtax is 0.75%—even lower. At $500,000, the surtax is 0.18% of income. That's what I call regressive taxes. That's what makes these taxes so unfair, so inappropriate and so wrong.

But that's not the only problem with these taxes. The bottom line is, people shouldn't have to pay them. People should not have to pay those taxes, those extra fees, those extra premiums. People expect that their income taxes, the taxes that exist already, should be covering those things.

We heard today—and it's quite frightening to imagine—that we don't even know for sure if those taxes are going to go to health care. There is no dedicated fund that's been set aside. From all of the trust this government has been able to garner with the public, there's a great fear out there that what we're calling a health premium is in fact just going to go into general revenue and be spent away on all kinds of different things. That's totally inappropriate. The tax itself is inappropriate, but the fact that this government is hiding or not coming clean with where exactly it's going to go is a bit of a problem. People are aware of that and they're watching very carefully. They're very concerned.

Add to that the other kinds of taxes that are increasing. You know what? User fees are just taxes with a different name, and people know that. Whether it's tobacco, liquor, licensing or whatever, the bottom line is, people simply can't afford to have all of these increases foisted upon them.

When you increase a user fee, again, it's another regressive type of tax. People are not being taxed based on their ability to pay. It's a user fee. That means no matter how much you can afford, you have to pay a set amount. That's why it's a regressive system. That's why the reliance on revenues from those kinds of fees is something I do not agree with and will not agree with, regardless.

The other quite interesting thing that I was quite concerned about was the lack of attention to those people who are hurting the most and who have been hurting very much for a very long time. In Hamilton East, as I traveled through the neighbourhoods and streets, I found we have many people who are on Ontario disability support. Those are people who are injured or unwell for very many different reasons and in very many different ways. I heard, time after time, significant concerns about their inability to cope, their inability to maintain a decent standard of living, their inability to maintain their homes. People were losing their homes, people were unable to maintain existing apartments, having to continually downsize and try to get cheaper and cheaper accommodations. Why? Because of the amount of benefits they are living on, and not through any fault of their own. These are people who, through no fault of their own, are unable to work. At the very least, society should be able to provide them with a decent quality of life.

1720

I was quite concerned because what people were asking for in terms of ODSP was an adjustment to reflect that, over many years of no adjustments, they had lost a significant amount of their income through inflation. Although a small amount was provided, it comes nowhere near to where people should be in regard to having a decent standard of living on ODSP.

The issue is that there were other choices this government could have made. They've been raised by my colleagues in the NDP, and I'm going to raise them once again. What was mentioned earlier is that in fact there were difficult choices. The government keeps saying there were difficult choices that had to be made. But one of the choices this government had, one of the options they could have undertaken—as opposed to the ones they did, which is whacking the poor and the most vulnerable people—was to collect $1.6 billion by creating two new tax brackets for those most able to pay. So instead of hitting those least able to afford it, why not put a little bit more on those most able to afford it? That's progressive taxation. That's the kind of thing I believe in. How about eliminating the employer health tax exemption that's sitting there for large corporations? That could have collected $700 million. That's a choice this government could have made but, no, they didn't. What about returning corporate tax rates to where they

were in 1999? That's $700 million that could have been raised with that kind of measure.

The bottom line is, this budget just reflects the broken promises that people were worried about when I was on the by-election hustings not too long ago. For moderate-income families, it adds up to painful increases in taxes and user fees, resulting in a reduced quality of life. The right thing to do is to ensure that people pay according to their means. That's the right thing to do. Instead, the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer. Why? Because of budgets like this.

We talk about this thing happening in our society where we're losing the middle class. The middle class is dwindling away. Why? Governments have an opportunity to change that, but they're not. Budgets like this will not change that. In fact, it just exacerbates a polarization of our society. Moderate- and low-income people are paying a higher proportion of their income for services through their taxes. Banks and insurance companies are paying nothing. That's the kind of injustice this budget reflects. That's the problem with this budget. It's quite basic. That's why seniors and low- and moderate-income families despise this budget. That's why this government, as some other people have said, has lost the trust of this populous, the trust of Ontarians and certainly the trust of the people who live in Hamilton East. They cannot trust this government. Why? Because they are continually and arrogantly defending this budget, day after day, in this Legislature, and it's absolutely wrong.

People are not happy. They're not impressed. They want this government to go back and reconsider not only the OHIP premium but the delisting of those services and the unfair nature of this budget. It's not right to put the cost of bringing this province back to where it should be on the backs of those least able to pay, on the backs of the poorest and on the backs of the seniors. That is totally wrong.

I'm very proud to have been able to be here to bring these concerns forward and to fulfill the promises I made to the voters in Hamilton East to bring their voice and their concerns to the government. I hope I've been able to do that in the appropriate time allotted.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): It is my pleasure to rise in response to the maiden speech of our newest member, the member from Hamilton East. She was elected just recently in a by-election in Hamilton East. As she pointed out, she is following in the footsteps of an icon, a legend down in that part of the world. Dominic Agostino served that area very well as a member of provincial Parliament, following his time as an alderman and before that as a school board trustee. As I mentioned the other day in this House, he was known to everyone as a tremendous champion and a tireless fighter for his constituents and for the underdog.

When elections are done and we all go home in the evening, when we're all filing out of this House, we sometimes like to set politics and partisanship aside and take time to congratulate one another, because we all know that largely we come here for the same reasons. We come here because we do want to make a change for the better and we want to represent the people of this province and make sure their voices are heard and that the things they would like to see done are done. Despite the criticism we have received in the House today, I think that is something that we did.

I know that I listened to my constituents. I went to the public consultations, and I was told by the stakeholders who came to the pre-budget and the post-budget consultations that they were amazed at how well the budget reflected the pre-budget consultations and that there were some very difficult choices to make. It's not perfect by any means, but it is a good start to rebuilding this province on the foundation the people of Ontario wanted.

Aside from that, I want to take the time to welcome Andrea Horwath to the House and to say I know she will speak for and represent the constituents of Hamilton East well and that she is a good voice for the people. Congratulations.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I enjoyed the maiden speech of the member for Hamilton East and echo the comments of the member from Stoney Creek: The member from Hamilton East does speak well on behalf of her constituents. A number of us had an opportunity to meet many of her people in recent weeks, knocking on doors in sunny Hamilton. On election day, I had the pleasure of looking after Hamilton Beach, Burlington Beach, the beach with the hydro towers on it. It was a good day to be down by the lake.

The member from Hamilton East made mention of tobacco taxes in her long list of other taxes and missed moves by the present government in their budget. Just to draw on that comment, we're having a tough time in tobacco country. In a sense, we have a three-legged stool with respect to the government's budget policy with respect to tobacco. We know a war has been declared on tobacco to bring in a smoke-free Ontario. We know that taxes have been increased twice during the reign of the present Liberal government. What we don't know is, when will the third leg of that stool be attached? When will we see the third promised approach; that is, the commitment of assistance to tobacco farmers that is ever more necessary as this particular government revs up the initiative to declare a smoke-free Ontario and continues to increase taxes on tobacco, as we've seen in this present budget?

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Mr Kormos: We know what real folks, real Ontario, is saying about this budget. They think it stinks. Let's take a look at what Liberal backbenchers are saying about the public response to this budget: "One MPP rethought his brave intent to field all incoming budget calls when they ran hotter than hot, with nine angry rants to each plaudit. Another backbencher thinks he got off lightly with just one death threat, while several caucus members received a slew of them." That's just one reporter with his contact with Liberal backbenchers.

It's enlightening to separate the stuff, the spin that Liberals try to put on the budget here.

In that old RCA Victor ad—you know the one I'm talking about, with the big Victrola megaphone and the dog sitting there—what did the caption say? "His Master's Voice." Right? These Liberal backbenchers are like that little dog sitting there in front of the Victrola, waiting for "his master's voice," which is the script they get, the spin they're told to put on this dog of a budget. You talk about three-legged, this is a three-legged dog. It's blind and it's mangy. Put it out of its misery. I say to government backbenchers, restore if you can—look, no guarantees from this guy—a modest amount of the integrity that some people thought you had when they voted for you. Stand up and condemn this budget as the miserable dog that it is.

Mr Barrett: What's the dog's name?

Mr Kormos: The dog's name? Never mind not hunting, this dog even forgot anything about house training, let me tell you. This dog deserves to be put out of its misery. Fulfill your responsibilities to your voters.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I think it was Winston Churchill who once said, "You never get to the end of the journey if you stop to throw stones at every barking dog."

We can all find things in anybody's budget. I could wax eloquently, I suspect, for an hour without notes about the NDP's and the Tories' past history, but I don't. I want to stand in my place today and welcome—

Mr Kormos: We're talking about the present.

Mr McMeekin: Wait, Peter. I want to welcome my good friend Andrea Horwath here. Andrea and I go back a long way. We've done some tremendous work over the years together. When I was mayor of the town of Flamborough and occasionally, like Don Quixote, tilted at some windmills, she was one person who took time to listen, to care and even to work together, often on some very unpopular causes. Together we were able to fight, to be champions and to encourage others to be champions for some of the poorest and most disenfranchised people in our community. I want to say to the honourable member from Hamilton East, and my good friend, that if we weren't going to have a Liberal representing Hamilton East, I'm sure glad you're here, because I know you'll be a strong and consistent voice.

That having been said, I just want to say that this isn't rocket science. The member from Hamilton East understands the challenges around downloading and some of the other things. When we arrived and were given the awesome task of forming the government, this place was in one hell of a mess. In fact, I think there was something like an $8.4-billion revenue problem, and we had to do one of two things: either fire more nurses and collapse some of those issues that we want to care about or increase the revenue stream and respond, as the people of Ontario wanted. We made some tough choices. That's what leadership's all about. I know the member from Hamilton East, in her heart of hearts, understands that.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. The member for Hamilton East has two minutes to reply.

Ms Horwath: It's actually my honour to first of all thank the member for Stoney Creek, Jennifer Mossop, for her kind words. Although it is an interesting relationship that we have, I do appreciate her words of welcome and particularly her remembrance of Dominic Agostino. I do have to say, though, that I know if Dominic were here, he would have some concerns about this budget as well, I'm sure. I'm glad I can bring some of those comments forward.

I also want to thank the member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant for his welcome and his comments. Although I may have some disagreement with some of the specifics, I think many times, when it comes to this budget, we seem to be on the same page. That's something I actually wasn't expecting, to be honest with you, but I'm pleased about it.

My colleague from Niagara Centre as always is very passionate and very brilliant in his delivery. He always brings a smile to my face, because he has many different ways of raising the issues and does that often in a very entertaining way. I thank him for that.

In terms of the final speaker here, my former colleague on regional council, the member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, we did have many challenges in the time we served together on regional council. One of the things I was proud of always doing on regional council, and on city council after that, was to stand up for the most vulnerable, to stand up for the people who are least able to stand up for themselves.

That's a tradition that I'm very proud to be able to continue here in this particular forum. I can tell you that those are the people I'm most concerned about with regard to the effect that this budget is going to have on them. I was able to save a lot of services, notwithstanding the downloading in Hamilton. Here in the Legislature I'll be fighting for those vulnerable people, for the seniors and the poor.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Brownell: Before beginning my words on the budget, I would like to express my congratulations to the members from Hamilton East and Scarborough Southwest, who gave their maiden speeches in the House this afternoon. I would also like to inform you, Mr Speaker, that I will be sharing my time with the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

With regard to giving maiden speeches here in the House this afternoon—a great honour for these two members. Shortly after the throne speech, I had that opportunity. It was in that throne speech that we set out our plan and made commitments to what we had expressed in a campaign. Now we have set out a budget which will build on, and which is building on, the ideas that we had in an election campaign and in a throne speech. So the individuals this afternoon were able to pick up on items from the budget and use those in the two maiden speeches here today. They did a commendable job and I want to congratulate them.

I would like to say at the outset too, and I alluded to that in a two-minuter that I had a little while back, that a letter from a Tracey Cruise was mentioned here this

afternoon, following the budget. I think it was the member from Niagara Centre who presented that letter. I too have received a number of letters, certainly a number of e-mails.

I can tell you that we have presented a budget that we can build on. It may not be perfect, but it's a stepping stone to the future. It's a stepping stone with many positive ideas that will get Ontario moving for the next four years.

We had an Ontario that had a health care system that needed fixing. We had an Ontario that had an education system and educators who needed the support of a caring government. They have discovered that in this budget. I will allude to that in a few moments.

Interjection: 30,000 new jobs in May.

Mr Brownell: We'll have that for sure. I know that last week we heard some members from across the floor make comments about things I had said following the budget. I was named. But I also want to say—from the newspaper article where they captured those quotes—and put on the record that I said, "But it is a good budget. We had some difficult choices to make." Those are words that I said.

Interjection.

Mr Brownell: Right. The budget may not be perfect. There were things that I would like to have seen in the budget that weren't there. There are some thing in the budget that I think we have to build on in the future.

I also said, "I have heard a lot of positive comments about this budget. There is no way I can say no to the budget presented." Certainly, as a collective piece of direction for the future, for the next four years, there is absolutely no way that I can turn my back on teachers; that I can turn my back on students in the classroom.

I spent 32 and a half years in a classroom and I can say we're absolutely right in saying that we have to get smaller class sizes in those primary grades, where we're forming young minds, where we're moving young minds into the senior grades and then off to high school, colleges, universities and then into apprenticeships too.

I laud all excellence for our plan. I believed in it when I ran, I believed in it when it was recognized in the throne speech and I believe in it now, when we will be doing something for education.

Interjection: Rozanski plus.

Mr Brownell: Rozanski plus, that's exactly what we're doing when we're investing an additional $2.6 billion over the next four years in our schools, including a $200-million investment that will leverage an additional $2.1 billion in capital funding to help fix schools. That is going to have an effect right in my riding. I have crumbling schools in my riding. I have crumbling schools in the Upper Canada District School Board, just as one example. They need some help, and they are getting help from this government and from this throne speech, and I'm excited about that.

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What's more exciting is our plan for educating, for providing more in training and education for the teachers we will put into those openings that will be created in the primary grades and beyond. We will increase the funding for spaces to an additional 1,000 new teachers in those training positions. And these are teachers who don't have to flee to the United States of America to get their education—

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): Hear, hear.

Mr Brownell:—that's right—as nurses have in the past number of years. I would say that in the past six, seven or eight years we've had nurses flee this province to the States, and former students of mine are some of those students who went to the States.

I'm also excited that we will have lead teachers in our schools, that we will have those mentors. The teachers who are starting out on a career will be able to look to those mentors, look to those lead teachers and get best practices in the schools, and I'm excited about that.

I had a wonderful 32 and a half years in education, and it was a happy time in December 2000 when I was able to pass the torch on to a young man who mentored in my class, who did his month of training in my class in April 2000. That was a wonderful, wonderful feeling, and that's the feeling this budget is going to give to education in Ontario.

We'd also like to say that the leaders in the communities of Cornwall and Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh have said that it is a positive budget. I would like to quote our local newspaper, the Standard-Freeholder. Terri Saunders, who reported this, also covered comments from Andrew Neuner, the CEO of the Cornwall Community Hospital:

"The public demand for quality health care services is the impetus for a new premium announced today, a local health official said....

"'I think this is a tax brought on by public demand for a high quality of service and things such as reduced wait times. This is how the government responded.'" This is a quote from Andrew Neuner, the CEO of the hospital.

"'The reality is this is happening in a lot of other provinces. Canadians have a high level of expectation when it comes to health care services, and that has to be paid for from somewhere.'" A quote from Mr Neuner.

"'We are pleased to see a priority being placed on prevention and promotion, that side of health care. We know it's necessary to fund what's required, and that has to be achieved one way or another.'"

I have met with Mr Neuner and I know that he, as a new CEO for the new Cornwall Community Hospital, wants to provide the best in health care delivery at his hospital. I know what those who work so hard in the centre de santé, the francophone health care centre in my constituency, want to provide. They want to provide, just as was mentioned in our budget, the best in community health care centres, those centres that during the campaign, and even pre-campaign, Premier McGuinty came down in my riding to see—to see in operation and to see that it works well. We are going to be providing an additional $14 million this year to fund and enhance community health centres. That's the way to deliver for Ontario.

I would also like to say that "Pat Finucan, director of the Cornwall campus of St Lawrence College"—and I'm delighted that the Minister of Colleges and Universities is here with us—said he's "impressed by Tuesday's provincial budget, which places a lot of emphasis on health and education.

"Among other things, the budget promises more money for universities and colleges trying to cope with a flood of students as a result of the elimination of the fifth year of secondary school."

This is what he said, following a meeting that was hosted in Ottawa: "I support the choices the government has made.

"The government had to introduce some taxes to pay for health care and education."

He knows that in order to get the best in health care, the best in education and provide that 3% increase—I heard the member from Hamilton East comment about funding for the Ontario disability support program and Ontario Works. We made a start. After 11 years, this is our start for the future for those people who, through no fault of their own, have to be supported by those programs.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It was Bob Rae in 1993 who froze it.

Mr Brownell: That's right, and it continued.

This is what we're doing: We're building on it, and we will build for the future and with the plan we have for the next four years.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Sarnia-Lambton.

Ms Di Cocco: I'm pleased to rise on this motion. I believe the people of Ontario are really tired of a lot of the rhetoric that I hear sometimes in this place. Do you know what this whole budget is about? It's about results. It's about achieving results—measurable results. One of the biggest problems that I believe every government has—and I believe some of the cynicism we hear from people is because there is a lot of rhetoric—is that government, the province of Ontario, has not measured results before.

When we arrive here as government, we all give our accountants our financial numbers so they can do income tax, for instance. When that happens—and this is what happened to us as government—the accountants will say that they base their evaluation of our income on the information we provide to them, and then they make the evaluation. What happened to us was that the government provided a set of numbers to the people of Ontario and to us, but those figures were not correct. They were distorted, and they did not reflect the finances of the province. Because of that, what happened is that they, unfortunately, put us between a rock and a hard place. We had to decide, how do we restore credibility and the foundation of fiscal responsibility and improve services at the same time? How do we do this? Well, in my humble opinion, we have done a very good job at beginning the process of restoring fiscal health as well as restoring core services in Ontario.

I've said before in this House that when we talk about responsible government—between 2000-01 and 2003-04, provincial program spending increased by 22% in this province. What happened is that—I'm not quite sure, Speaker. You're giving me—

The Deputy Speaker: You have about half a minute.

Ms Di Cocco: I have six minutes and 46—

The Deputy Speaker: I thought you might be confused, but at 10 to 6, the vote is placed.

Ms Di Cocco: OK. So I have half a minute and you're going to cut me off. I thought I had 10 minutes. I apologize.

Anyway, I say to the people of Ontario in the short time ... have, do not judge us on the simplistic spin we hear, but judge us over the long haul on results we achieve and better management that we initiate with more transparency and accountability.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 57(b), I am now required to put the question:

Mr Sorbara has moved that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1750 to 1800.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of Mr Sorbara's motion, rise one at a time.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard
Bentley, Christopher	Gravelle, Michael	Peters, Steve
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoy, Pat	Peterson, Tim
Bountrogianni, Marie	Jeffrey, Linda	Phillips, Gerry
Bradley, James J.	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Racco, Mario G.
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Sergio, Mario
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Mauro, Bill	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Sorbara, Greg
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Di Cocco, Caroline	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Duncan, Dwight	Orazietti, David	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fonseca, Peter	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	Miller, Norm
Barrett, Toby	Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John
Bisson, Gilles	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Hampton, Howard	Martel, Shelley	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hardeman, Ernie	Martiniuk, Gerry	Witmer, Elizabeth

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 60; the nays are 21.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It is therefore resolved that the House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

It being past 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1804.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon / L'hon James K. Bartleman
Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Alvin Curling
Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks at the Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Waterloo-Wellington	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Parliamentary assistant to the Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / adjoint parlementaire au président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Baird, John R. (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	Deputy opposition House leader / leader parlementaire adjoint de l'oppostion
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	
Bartolucci, Hon / L'hon Rick (L)	Sudbury	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Bentley, Hon / L'hon Christopher (L)	London West / London-Ouest	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (ND)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Chief New Democratic Party whip / whip en chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Bountrogianni, Hon / L'hon Marie (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse , ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Bradley, Hon / L'hon James J. (L)	St Catharines	Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs
Broten, Laurel C.(L)	Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Parliamentary assistant to the Premier / adjointe parlementaire au premier ministre
Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma-Manitoulin	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Richesses naturelles
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh	
Bryant, Hon / L'hon Michael (L)	St Paul's	Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Cansfield, Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de l'Énergie
Caplan, Hon / L'hon David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy House Leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint
Chambers, Hon / L'hon Mary Anne V. (L)	Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Churley, Marilyn (ND)	Toronto-Danforth	Deputy New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire adjoint du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton-Lawrence	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Finances
Cordiano, Hon / L'hon Joseph (L)	York South-Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin (L)	Scarborough-Rouge River	Speaker / Président
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest–Mississauga	
Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Sarnia-Lambton	Parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for democratic renewal / adjointe parlementaire au ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Dombrowsky, Hon / L'hon Leona (L)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Duguid, Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Urban) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement (Secteur urbain)
Duncan, Hon / L'hon Dwight (L)	Windsor-St Clair	Minister of Energy, Chair of Cabinet, Government House Leader / ministre de l'Énergie, président du Conseil des ministres, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Chief opposition whip / whip en chef de l'opposition
Eves, Ernie (PC)	Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey	Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition
Flaherty, Jim (PC)	Whitby-Ajax	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Travail
Fonseca, Peter (L)	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Gerretsen, Hon / L'hon John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Gravelle, Michael (L)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora-Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton East / Hamilton-Est	
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham-Kent Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Erie-Lincoln	
Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Burlington	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	
Kennedy, Hon / L'hon Gerard (L)	Parkdale-High Park	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Klees, Frank (PC)	Oak Ridges	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Kwinter, Hon / L'hon Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	Chief government whip / whip en chef du gouvernement
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity-Spadina	
Marsales, Judy (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton-Ouest	

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Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
McGuinty, Hon / L'hon Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
McMeekin, Ted (L)	Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot	Parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for seniors / adjoint parlementaire au ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon / L'hon Madeleine (L)	Ottawa-Vanier	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Milloy, John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron-Bruce	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture and Food / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation
Mossop, Jennifer F.(L)	Stoney Creek	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de la Culture
Munro, Julia (PC)	York North / York-Nord	
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Orazietti, David (L)	Sault Ste Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Parsons, Ernie (L)	Prince Edward-Hastings	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Transports
Patten, Richard (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de l'Éducation
Peters, Hon / L'hon Steve (L)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation
Peterson, Tim (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Tourism and Recreation / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs
Phillips, Hon / L'hon Gerry (L)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches-East York / Beaches–York-Est	Deputy New Democratic Party whip / whip adjoint du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Pupatello, Hon / L'hon Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Children and Youth Services / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Racco, Mario G. (L)	Thornhill	
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Ramsay, Hon / L'hon David (L)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds-Grenville	Opposition house leader / chef parlementaire de l'opposition
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Smith, Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Smitherman, Hon / L'hon George (L)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Hon / L'hon Greg (L)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Lanark-Carleton	
Takhar, Hon / L'hon Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
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Watson, Hon / L'hon Jim (L)	Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises
Wilkinson, John (L)	Perth-Middlesex	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	
Wong, Tony C. (L)	Markham	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Wynne, Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General / adjoint parlementaire au procureur général

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First Session, 38th Parliament

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Monday 7 June 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 38e législature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 7 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 7 juin 2004

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004
SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 3, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures / Projet de loi 83, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Further debate?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: If I could get a clarification on whose turn it is in the rotation? I thought it was six minutes.

The Acting Speaker: It's the NDP's turn. The member for Trinity-Spadina has risen in his seat.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): John, come and sit beside me.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): You've got 10 minutes, so get at it.

Mr Marchese: Please, I've got 10 minutes. It's a pleasure to speak to this bill.

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: Quiet, are you kidding? Supporting my buddies here as they go after you, assaulting you day in and day out? Are you kidding? That's not quiet.

I just want to tell the citizens of Ontario that it's a quarter to 7, more or less, give or take a minute or two, and we are on live and we welcome you to this political channel. What we're discussing tonight, more or less, is a budget bill. I've just got a couple of things to say. All I have, Jim, is just 10 mere minutes. Do you remember that? How we used to—

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): Why are they muzzling you?

Mr Marchese: Ten minutes. I need 20 minutes to wind up and a whole hour for a whole speech. But thank God we got status and we now have an hour. We now have a whole hour for our lead bills. I can't wait for Gerard Kennedy to introduce a bill to which I can respond for one whole hour.

Mr Dunlop: He's afraid of you.

Mr Marchese: You never know.

There are a couple of things that this government has done with respect to this budget that I think a lot of people don't like. The Liberals will stand up day in and day out and say how proud they are. They're proud of this budget, right John? John is proud of this budget. And not just John, every Liberal is proud. Some soldiers are more proud than others. It depends on whether you're a real trooper or not. If you are a trooper leaning towards cabinet, you're going to be supporting this budget without restraint, and the others will be a little more silent, a little circumspect, a little worried about their defence of this bill.

Liberals will say they are defending this bill, but they're not. I'm telling you, they're not. You don't see them on the campaign trail. Michael, some of them are there. Some ridings are safer for Liberals than others. But where the campaigns are in trouble, where they are faltering, where the campaigns are falling apart, where Liberals are disappearing, you don't see Liberal MPPs defending this budget. You don't. Sorry, you just don't. And why don't we see Liberal MPPs at the door? Because, man, are they ever afraid.

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Who is?

Mr Marchese: You guys and you gals are all afraid to be on that campaign because the federal Liberals are saying, "Please don't do us any favours. Don't come knocking at the doors with us. We just don't want you. We don't need you. You've done enough favours for us." That's what they're saying. Because if you were really proud of this budget, you would say to your federal members, "I'm going to join you on the trail because, man, can we convince people. You've just got to give us some time."

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I just did on Saturday. I knocked on doors on Saturday.

Mr Marchese: Eh, Tony? Tony went. He's a proud member. He's still here.

Interjection: He's still alive.

Mr Marchese: Quite right, he's still standing.

I'm going to tell you, I don't think Markham is a place where you can go and say, "By the way, we just increased your taxes. But don't worry; we can explain it to you. It's progressive."

I love hearing Sorbara. He says to the NDP, "Why is the NDP going after the rich all the time?" Because New Democrats think we should go after those who have money as opposed to those who don't have money. When the Liberals say, "The NDP goes after the rich," does that

mean you go after the poor? That's what your budget has done.

Then they say that those who earn less than 20,000 bucks are excluded. That's progressive. Mercifully, those who earn $20,000 or less are excluded from getting a whacking. Thank God. Imagine someone earning $10,000 or $15,000 getting whacked for 300 bucks with a new expense. If you earn $20,000 plus one cent, over a period of a couple of years you get whacked for 300 bucks.

Mr Colle: No, it's 60 bucks.

Mr Marchese: Non, mes amis. Over a couple of années, you get whacked for 300 bucks. Now, Jimmy, if you're earning a million bucks, you're safe; you're OK. All you've got to do is pay 900 bucks. That's not bad. That's a sweetheart deal. With the Liberals, if you've got money, you're safe; you don't have to worry. We thought the Tories were bad, but under the Liberals, you've got a progressive health care whacking, so that if you earn $200,000, $300,000, $400,000, $500,000, $600,000, $700,000, $1 million or $2 million, you only get whacked for 900 bucks. That's a sweetheart deal in my books.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Plus your surtax.

Ms Churley: Who cares about the surtax?

Mr Wilkinson: The people who pay care about it.

Mr Marchese: John says there's a surtax that hits the millionaires. The millionaires are screaming bloody murder. With that surtax the millionaires are saying, "We're leaving the country because we're overtaxed." The poor bankers: They've got such a weight on their shoulders that they're going to the US. With that surtax and this new health levy, 900 bucks, they're just going to leave the country—"We're leaving the country" Please. A progressive tax—come on.

I need to come back to this, so I want to move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Trinity-Spadina has moved adjournment of the debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1853 to 1923.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Thank you. Please take your seats.

Deputy Clerk (Ms Deborah Deller): The ayes are 11; the nays are 31.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

The Chair recognizes the member from Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Speaker. Welcome back, citizens. It's 7:25, political channel, Queen's Park.

The Liberals are so proud of this budget that they don't want to take it out and debate it. So proud are they that they're giving the opposition no time to debate the bill. Now, does that seem consistent to you? If I were proud of this bill, I'd be taking it out for weeks and weeks. Why? To persuade the public that this is a great bill, that this bill has nuggets in it and that all people need to do is find them.

But we have no hearings from them. That's why we're here tonight. We're here debating and ringing bells because we're asking Dwight Duncan to give us some time to debate it with the public, so they get to listen to how proud the Liberals are of this bill. I'm trying to do them a favour, because both Sorbara and McGuinty say, "We're proud," and, "I won't back down." McGuinty just said that. I love that. McGuinty said, "I won't back down." I love that. But if you're proud, you have to get out and defend it.

Look, your friends need you. They need you today, not on June 28. They need you today. You have to walk arm in arm with them to explain to the public how good the bill is and pick out every little nugget and show them how good it is, how health will be improved as a result of whacking people who earn $20,000, $30,000, $40,000, $50,000, and that it's good for them to be whacked because they're going to love it. You have to explain it to them. You have to get out there and do that. For that purpose, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Trinity-Spadina has moved adjournment of the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I declare that the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1927 to 1957.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 9; the nays are 31.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost. Further debate?

Mr Marchese: So the point is this: You need to have hearings, not to give the public any input into the hearings, but for you to defend why you would remove chiropractic services from the public, why you would remove physiotherapy and why you would remove optometrists—the poor optometrists. You've got to go out there and say to the public, "We had to make tough choices. We had to whack some people in order to be able to give them more health care, and they're going to pay for it. But we've got to take some services away. We're going to give you free vaccinations"—tough choice, right?—"but we're going to make you pay for it."

See, you've got to get out there and defend that reasoning, because they'll understand. Those are nuggets, you understand. You've got to get out. There are over 30 members here.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Marie, Polkaroo to you, too. Marie, you've got to be out in Hamilton. Your member is in

trouble. There are over 30 Liberal members in this place. You don't need more than 12 or 20—33 members here? I thought you were proud of this budget. Get out there and defend it.

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I listened very, very carefully to the member from Trinity-Spadina—

Interjection: In between hours.

Mr Duguid: —in between hours. Like the member from Trinity-Spadina, I guess, as I speak to the people in TV land out there—they must be wondering what's going on here. The member usually is really emotional. He usually has a good argument behind him. Today he barely talked about anything to do with the budget. I think, frankly, it was because he was having trouble finding something that he really didn't agree with in this budget. I think that's why he used procedural motions every once in a while. He'd move a motion to adjourn or another motion to take a 30-minute bell because he had to think of other real reasons why he opposes this budget. I know the member from Trinity-Spadina supports the fact that we had to make tough decisions, because I know that if he had to make those tough decisions, he would have agreed with doing that. I know he believes in the need to transform our health care system.

Like most reasonable people, he knows that we inherited a very difficult situation, a $6-billion deficit. He knows that wasn't going to be wished away. So we had to make some tough decisions in order to do things like bring about another 9,000 cataract surgeries each year. The member knows that that's a tough decision we had to make. Do we do that, or do we not do that? Well, we decided we're going to improve the availability of cataract surgeries. We decided we're going to improve the availability of cardiac procedures. It's very tough when you're going through—you need to get an operation, you need to get surgery and you can't get access to it.

Joint replacements: The member knows the pain people go through when they're waiting in line for joint replacements. So I think he knows the tough decision we had to make to ensure that we could deliver on that. Dialysis treatments, $600 million more going into primary care, 150 family health teams coming up.

As my time winds down, the member knows very—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The Chair recognizes the member from Durham.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Actually, I was inspired by the member from Trinity-Spadina because—really, it was quite simple. The challenge to you to get your message out, as opposed to the million-dollar radio ads that you're doing now to convince people on the budget, was to simply have public hearings. We're committed to that. Our party whip and House leader have said it publicly. The NDP have said it publicly. In fact, members of your caucus have said that public hearings are the way to go. The debate needs to be held. It's not just a referendum question. Dalton McGuinty promised—and I'm looking at the quote here—to have a referendum in the event that he was going to raise taxes. That is what this is about: Is it OK to raise taxes on health care; is it OK to delist services? I think it was a fair debate presented by the member from Trinity-Spadina—the man from the trailer park review that I've recently been aware of.

Tonight there was a reception at Queen's Park. Many people would know; it's the naturopathic medicine of Ontario. It draws to my attention that, really, this debate should be about public health and about patient choice. Are you prepared to listen to the people of Ontario and to give them choice? No, you're not. You're going to impose a tax. You're going to privatize chiropractic. You're going to privatize ophthalmology. You're going to privatize physiotherapy.

Mr Speaker, you know that this government refused, in their arrogance, to listen to the people of Ontario. In fact—I can't use unparliamentary terms—they obfuscated this during the election debate. They said, "We wouldn't raise your taxes, and we won't cut them either." I think we need to have public hearings on this. The member from Trinity-Spadina has asked for it. I ask you to support his request.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is always a pleasure to listen to my friend from Trinity-Spadina. When he speaks, he speaks with passion. He talks with his arms a-flailing. He walks. He talks. He tells it the way it is. He has talked about what the problems are in this budget in a way that no one else in this House can. He talks it because it's the plain truth.

There are problems in this budget that you cannot see, because you have blinkers on, on that side of the House. You have blinkers on because you have not heard what the people are telling you out there. The people are telling you things you do not want to hear, and therefore you're shutting them out. I tell you, you have done a real disservice to—

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I like your tie.

Mr Prue: The tie is a great tie. Thank you, Marie. It's a great tie.

Your federal cousins are suffering so badly because of what you have said in this House and what you continue to do in this House. He has alluded to that fact, and I will tell you, it has been a real disaster for your party. It has been a complete disaster, because the honeymoon that usually lasts for six months or a year or even two years for a new party such as yours in this House is long but gone. I will tell you, it is not there anymore. The people are fed up and you should listen to what the member for Trinity-Spadina has to say.

We need committees. We need the people to come out to actually talk to you face to face about what they think about this budget. It's not the same as your hand-picked committees you had before the budget, those secret little things that nobody knew about, that you had to be a good Liberal to get inside. We need real, honest people to come there and say the good things, if there are any, and

the bad things that are in this budget. We need you to be mature politicians to recognize when you're wrong and to change them.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I will just take a couple of moments now to reflect on the remarks by the member for Trinity-Spadina. What I'd like to do is lift the veil of doom and gloom that the member for Trinity-Spadina presented.

In the month of May, there were 30,800 new jobs in Ontario—9,200 new jobs in manufacturing. Since this government came to power, there are 70,000 new jobs in the province of Ontario. According to a recent KPMG report, Ontario today is one of the most competitive jurisdictions in the world in which to live, work and play. It's time we got rid of the doom and gloom from the member for Trinity-Spadina.

What are they against over there? Our new free vaccine program for chickenpox, meningitis and pneumonia will save families more than $600 per child in Ontario. We have invested an additional $4 million annually to help children from low-income families arrive in class ready to learn through the school-based children's breakfast program. And there is more. Do you want me to keep going? We have all kinds here.

For our farming community: The party opposite brought in the nutrient program but no money. We have a program for $20 million to help our family farmers in Ontario. And there is more.

Mr Duguid: Some 100,000 new home care—

Mr Leal: We have all kinds of money for new home care, which will keep people out of the hospitals and drive down the budgets that are increasing for our hospitals. All good things in this budget. It's time, as I said, to lift the veil of doom and gloom over there.

The Acting Speaker: Response from the member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Marchese: Before the election, we debated many Liberals, including Marie Bountrogianni, where we said to them, "Look, you can't increase services by $7 billion. Deal with the deficit that's in the order of $4 billion"—even Marie Bountrogianni knew that—"not increase taxes, and balance the budget."

"You can't do that," we said to them. "That's dissimulation, dissembling. It's manipulation of the facts. You can't do it."

But no, the Liberals said, "Yes, we can." Sure they can. They get into power and they say, "But the Tories left us with a $6.2-billion deficit. What can we do? We didn't know. We're innocent victims of a plot by the Tories."

Please, you sound so stupid when you do that. You've got to stop it, and tell your Premier to stop it. It sounds bad. I've got to tell you, it sounds bad, including what Sorbara does. They both sound bad. OK, so that's the problemo of the past.

As it relates to the present, with this budget, what you are doing is giving socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor. Marie Bountrogianni, that's what you're doing: extracting money from the poor to give to the poor bankers who are going to leave for the US because they're really burdened by the tax burden. Please, you sound stupid when you do that, I've got to tell you.

You can't go after the poor the way you are. You can't say, "We're going to give them free vaccinations, but if you're earning $36,000 you've got to pay 500 bucks." You can't do that. It's not a good choice. You can't give them vaccinations on the one hand and take away physiotherapy, chiropractic services and optometry. You can't do that.

Good Liberals, you are in serious trouble. You need hearings to go and defend yourselves out there. You've got to say, "Look, we've got a budget that's greatly progressive and the NDP has got it all wrong." Just go out there and defend it. Be the brave soldiers that you are. Go out and do it. There are 33 of you here in this House. Get out there and do that job.

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The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Davenport.

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I'll be sharing my time with the member from Scarborough Southwest. At the same time I'd like to welcome Dr John Kotowski, who is joining us for this debate. He was one of the founding members of the Polish Canadian community. Welcome to him.

Anyone watching this debate can see quite clearly that the opposition is trying to drown out the position of our party, drown out the positive aspects of this debate and drown out the positive aspects of this budget. While it is true that the opposition's job is to try to point out the weakness in the campaign toward good health care, to try to point out the weakness in the budget, I will tell you, it is also the job of the opposition to point out some of the positive parts of this budget. Have you done that? No; you're like a mad dog after a bone. You're just concentrating solely on the negative parts of it. That's why you've been called the prophet of doom and gloom, and I will stick by it.

Why is the opposition only concentrating on the problem of the health premium? They're saying it's going to cost the majority of Ontarians $900—

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): Not true.

Mr Ruprecht: —which is not true, but everywhere we see today—open the paper, and when you open your mouth, it's always the same story: "It's going to cost us $900." It simply is not true.

I want the public to know that at $21,000 of income, you pay exactly $5 a month. That's the premium you pay, and not a penny more. What we're talking about here are two different kinds of visions. We're talking about a different vision from what you had in the past.

I'm not going to stand here and tell you about the broken promises of the Conservative Party. There were a lot of broken promises. I've got them right here. I'm not going to lower myself and read out all the broken promises of that party.

For your information, I also have all the broken promises of the NDP. If you'd like for me to read them all

out—they're right here, but I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to do that.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Do it.

Mr Ruprecht: No, I'm not going to do that. One lie does not create another lie in this kind of atmosphere.

We're talking about a different kind of vision. You know what the vision of the McGuinty government is. It's outlined in this budget. While it is true that no one is perfect, and while it is true that it was tough to make a decision, the question we should ask ourselves—in fact, the question all Ontarians should ask themselves—is: Who do you trust more? Did you trust the former leader of the Conservative Party?

Mr Dunlop: Yes.

Mr Ruprecht: Yeah, right. Did you trust the former leader? We know the policies of the former Conservative government. We've got them all right here. We know all the broken promises.

Did the public trust the NDP and their policies? No. It was obvious what happened on October 2. But my friends, it is clear. I and my colleagues here and a vast majority of Ontarians trust Dalton McGuinty. Why do they trust Dalton McGuinty? Why do they trust him, essentially, in the end?

Interjection.

Mr Ruprecht: I said that no one was perfect—but in the end it's a question of vision.

What was your vision? What was the vision of your party? What was it? Do you know what it was? I've got the vision right here, full of broken promises that you're accusing us of today. What was your vision? Your vision was one of division. Your vision was one of scapegoating. Your vision was one of setting up one person against another, one group against another group. That was your vision. And do you know what, my friends? That vision was sorely rejected at the polls.

What's the vision over here from the NDP? What's that kind of vision? Some people say it's not a bad vision; it just so happens that the Liberal vision, the vision of Dalton McGuinty, is the best under the circumstances.

I said there was no perfection here, and you know if you had to make the decisions for the benefit of the people of Ontario, you probably would have done the same thing, if you asked yourselves in our own hearts. Ask yourself: Faced with the budget deficit of close to $6 billion, what could you have done that would have been better? I know what you would have done, and all of us on this side know what you would have done: You would have cut services. True or not? Would you have cut services? That's the question. Because you'd have to cut services.

Interjection.

Mr Ruprecht: And do you know what? Let me tell you something else—

The Acting Speaker: Order. The member from Simcoe North, I don't know what you're showing. What do you have there?

Mr Dunlop: Mr Speaker, I want to show you a picture of Dalton McGuinty.

The Acting Speaker: I think you want to remove that. I don't want to see that. Put it down. I don't want to see that again. Continue, member for Davenport.

Mr Ruprecht: I'll tell you the experience I had in this last campaign. It was the Conservative candidate who in a public meeting looked me straight in the eye and said, "Do you know what? There is no budget deficit." I said, "Yes, there is. There is a budget deficit of $2 billion." Today, my friends, the truth is different. There is no budget deficit of $2 billion; no, there's a budget deficit of $5.6 billion to $6 billion. That's the legacy.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. The member from Durham and the member from Simcoe North, I want a little more quiet in here. I want to hear the member. Member from Davenport.

Mr Ruprecht: I'm trying to point out that it's a question of vision. The vision of our party and the vision of our leader, whom we trust, is clear: We are in this boat together. If one member of our crew hurts, we're all affected by it. If you suffer, Garfield, we're affected by it—yes or no? You could shut this whole place down just by yourself. Imagine that. If you suffer, we all suffer. What we're saying simply—because you still don't understand—is that we are one family here. We're one family in one big boat, and that boat is called Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr Ruprecht: What we're saying to you today is that we have a vision that looks after our family members. That was not your vision but that's the vision of Dalton McGuinty. We are a family, and do you know what, Mr Dunlop? Even you belong to our family, you who are shouting right now and trying to shut us down on this side. You belong to us too. You belong to this family.

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The question is simple; it's a vision question: Do we look after the members of the Ontario public or don't we? And if we try to ensure that all of us are part and parcel of this vision, if we look to that, then there's only one conclusion to come to: Dalton McGuinty didn't do this because he wanted to enrich himself. Dalton McGuinty didn't do this because he wanted to hurt somebody. Dalton McGuinty, our party, the Treasurer and the finance minister did this because we wanted to ensure that all of us have a stake in this system. We all have a stake in the system. Even the most poor, the most disenfranchised, have a stake in this system. If one hurts, we all hurt. We know that's true. It sounds corny; yes, it might sound corny, but you remember SARS don't you? You remember SARS and how quickly it spread. We are not only a global community; we're certainly a community right here in Ontario.

We remember. What decision could Dalton McGuinty have made when he was faced with the mess you left behind? You'll remember that Mr Kennedy, who is the Minister of Education today, said to all of us in the opposition, "Garfield, go to your schools and look at the

infrastructure, look the buildings, look at the swimming pools, look at the schools."

Mr Dunlop: We don't have swimming pools in Simcoe county.

Mr Prue: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd just like the Chair to rule. The member for Davenport, at the beginning of his speech, said he was sharing his time with the member for Scarborough Southwest. Does that mean the member for Scarborough Southwest has now exhausted his speaking time?

The Acting Speaker: No, he hasn't.

Questions and comments?

Mr Ruprecht: On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

The Acting Speaker: Yes? What's the point of order?

Mr Ruprecht: The member for Scarborough Southwest indicated—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Come on, now.

Questions and comments?

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I could scarcely believe my ears a minute ago when I heard the member for Davenport talking about, "Trust Dalton McGuinty." Trust Dalton McGuinty. I'm reading today's newspaper. It says, "Voter Support for McGuinty's Liberals Plummets, says Poll....

"The poll also found the Premier is bearing the brunt of voter discontent...." Only 9% of the people of Ontario trust Dalton McGuinty.

He's talking about the deficit. The deficit games that the Liberal government is playing with the budget they just brought in are quite interesting, some of the games they're up to.

What about the consultation that went into the decision to take Muskoka out of the north? They talk about being an open and accountable government. It was quite a surprise for the people of Muskoka when they learned, the day after the budget came out, that there was a line on page 96 of the budget papers that removes Muskoka from the north. I think this is very unfair, particularly in light of the fact that they talk about consulting. Well, there was no consultation with the people of Muskoka. They just slid it in there and didn't discuss it with the municipalities, with the people who will be affected by reduced health care, or with the municipalities that won't be receiving northern Ontario heritage funds. It was just slid into the budget without any consultation whatsoever. The people of Muskoka are just now realizing what transpired on May 18, when the provincial budget came down, and the tremendous effect it will be having on the people of Muskoka. That's why I've received about 2,500 petitions to this point, and a few hundred arriving every day, as people mobilize to fight the government on this partisan and unfair move to remove Muskoka from the north that's in the provincial budget.

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm very pleased to rise and make comments on the debate by the member for Davenport. One of the first things the member raised was the issue of trust. If he really, truly believes the people of Ontario trust this government, that it's going to be acting in their best interests, I can tell you he hasn't been reading the papers and he hasn't been knocking on doors. What I'm hearing is exactly the opposite. The people of Ontario—certainly the people of Hamilton East—the people who right now are talking to the federal cousins of the government in this provincial Legislature are saying, "We do not trust Liberals. We will trust anybody but the Liberals." Why is that? It's because they were betrayed by this budget.

The member talked a little bit about vision. He talked about a shared kind of vision, that we're all one family. I can tell you that when you're in a family, you don't cut the legs off the most vulnerable member; you support the most vulnerable member of the family. You pull together as a family and you say, "We support the most vulnerable members of the family." You don't cut their legs off; you don't whack them; you support them. You tell them, "We understand that you're vulnerable," and you provide extra supports for them, not the opposite. You tell them, "We will take your extra burden and share it equally amongst those who are most able to share that burden." That's what a family does; that's what vision is; that's what teamwork is. That's not what this budget is. This budget is exactly the opposite.

When people in Ontario are asking the question of whom to trust, it's certainly not this government, because this government brought down a budget that broke the trust of the people. After only a few months in office, the trust of the people was broken by this budget. So the member for Davenport needs to get out there and start talking to some of these people to understand exactly where the will of the public is on the issue of the budget.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Scarborough Southwest.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr O'Toole: That's his maiden speech.

Mr Berardinetti: No, I made that earlier today.

I just wanted to make a few remarks. I know that in the rotation, the next speakers will be the Conservatives, and from there we'll go on to the NDP. I would ask, and I guess this is a question to all who are here tonight: Let's debate. We're here till midnight. The member from Davenport, Mr Ruprecht, made a passionate speech for 10 minutes about how he felt about the budget. I would like to hear from each and every member of the Conservative caucus, as well as every member from the NDP caucus here today and other colleagues of mine from the Liberal caucus. So when the time comes, in the next few minutes, and you get your chance to speak, don't ring the bells to adjourn the debate. Don't ring the bells to adjourn the House. Let's debate. We're here. We've decided to stay till midnight. I'm happy to stay here till midnight.

Let's look at the issues: the education issue; the issue of health care. Are we better off today in education, in health care or in the way that cities are operating than we were five years ago or in 1995 when the Tories took power? We weren't, in my view, and I'd like to debate

that with the Conservatives. I want to hear what the Tories have to say on these issues.

I think that in the remarks made by the member from Davenport, he made it clear that he felt the Conservatives and the NDP didn't come through or wouldn't come through with good ideas and good plans. We put our plans on the table, and they should be debated.

So, please. I don't think it's appropriate that you should sit here and ring the bells, as the member from Trinity-Spadina did. We could sit here till midnight. It's only 25 after 8. I'm more than happy to sit here till midnight today. We'll do the same tomorrow. We'll do the same Wednesday. We'll do the same Thursday. Let's spend time in the House here and discuss this matter and not ring the bells, which I know they're going to do. Shame on them.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I am pleased to respond to the member from Davenport, but I also wanted to respond to the member from Scarborough Southwest. He says we shouldn't be ringing the bells in here. If we had our druthers, we wouldn't be ringing them. But I'll tell you, the people in Ontario sure had their bell rung on May 18. That was quite a blow.

The members of the government are saying that we're being unfair, that we're being vicious, that we're saying all these bad things about this budget. But I think the people of Ontario have said something about the budget: 9%—that's single digits—say the Premier's doing a good job. Dalton McGuinty's latest poll from Osprey news service—9% of Ontarians say Dalton McGuinty's doing a good job. He is sinking like a rock and like an anchor, and he's dragging down the Prime Minister with him.

So are we hard on the budget? We're only reflecting what the people of the province of Ontario are telling us to do. They took a body blow on May 18, and they're trying to respond in the only way they know how. They're asking us as members of the loyal opposition to stand for them and say, "We've got to get a message across to the government." They can't take it. Their pockets have been picked, and there's nothing left.

They need some relief. Relief could come in the form of proper public hearings to deal with this budget matter. Let's go back to the people and ask them, "How do you really feel about this budget?" That sham of a consultation process that was stocked and stacked with whoever the government wanted to bring to give them the message they wanted and come out with a budget that they did in the end anyway—sorry, Mr Speaker, I've run out of time.

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The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Ruprecht: To the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka: Thank you very much for your comments. But I just wanted to remind you, when you say that people have not been consulted: Do you remember what happened when the government that you had was downloading on the municipalities? "Downloading" means providing the services and giving them to the municipalities for their responsibility. The suffering that that caused was tremendous. Do you remember that?

I remember the member from Hamilton East saying we're not looking after the most vulnerable. I just want to remind you: Which party was it that increased for the first time, after at least 12 years, the minimum wage? Which party was it? It wasn't your party; it was the Liberal Party.

The member from Scarborough Southwest had a good idea. He said: "Stop making the circus here. Don't start ringing the bells." You want to debate this budget? Point at some of the good points in the budget as well, and let me just tell you about some of the good points in the budget, which you don't want to show to the people of Ontario. The good points are shorter waiting lists for radiation and chemotherapy, nine new MRI sites, improvements in home care for 95,000 more Ontarians, from one bath to two, meningitis vaccination for children, 8,000 new full-time nursing positions.

It is very clear that people out there need to be informed and not to be misinformed. You are solely misinforming the people. You're trying to shout us down, as you are trying to shout me down right now. The point is basically this: There are many items in this budget which are very positive, and I'm asking you today to stop your negativity and gloom and bloom and whatever. Point out to us what is the best part of this budget. Point out the good parts, because that is part of the opposition as well.

Mr O'Toole: It is indeed my distinct pleasure, on behalf of the opposition, to bring some dignity and some content to the debate on the budget. I'm going to start with quite a shocking statement of the testimony of the integrity of the government. I'm reading an official document, signed by the Premier of Ontario, I might say.

Interjection: Which Premier?

Mr O'Toole: Well, it's Greg Sorbara—no, pardon me. It's actually Dalton who? No, pardon me, McGuinty. In all respect, it is signed. I'll retract that, because it is respect for the Premier—

The Acting Speaker: Member for Durham, can you withdraw that? Are you going to withdraw?

Mr O'Toole: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: OK.

Mr O'Toole: I'm going to read it. It says: "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, promise, if my party is elected as the next government, that I will not raise taxes or implement new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters, and not run deficits. I promise to abide by the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act." It was signed by the now Premier of Ontario. It's dated September 11.

What struck me on this was the date: September 11; the twin towers. Does it ring a bell with you? The gloom around that event, echoed by this statement here by the now Premier, signed and witnessed in a testimonial document, should convince the people of Ontario that they're—unfortunately, some of my wording might be too strong—not to be trusted. It's not new to the Liberal Party. We're hearing all sorts of promises. We heard 230-plus promises—Mr Speaker, you know that full well—many of which have been reneged upon, to the dis-

appointment of all members of the House, many, I might say, members of the government. I'm going to reach into my testimonial bag here and recite some of those to draw to their attention that you can do the right thing for the people, your constituents, the people who placed their trust in you. Do the right thing. Really, all I'm calling for is, not to reverse the budget—I understand that; there's a whole debate about that—it's to have public hearings. I ask, with all the humbleness that I can muster—

Interjection: Humility.

Mr O'Toole: —and humility, to have public hearings. We, as the feeble, well, not feeble, but certainly the limited opposition—with the limited resources, now that the NDP have all the resources—will be positive. We will work toward three critical things that I want you to do, three critical things that I humbly urge you to do on behalf of the people:

Rescind the tax on health care. What a deception. Is that permissible? It's obfuscation. You said, "I will not raise your taxes once cent." I can remember those ads, the million-dollar American ads. You saw them. It's that sort of language that actually diminishes the importance—each member here should be insulted by those artificial promises because our integrity here, collectively, is at stake.

There are some members on the other side who do have the courage to speak with integrity—and at some risk, I might say, because they'll never see the light of cabinet. They'll never know the inside of the padded door of the secret room. But you will get re-elected because your constituents know you're listening and responding.

Some of the members of cabinet, I'm surprised—I know their integrity. But, you know, Dalton and Finance Minister Sorbara are running it via those little minions in the Premier's office. I sense it in the hallways. The ministers don't have any say. I'm hearing it myself. But I'm going to mention just a few of the members who I think should be saved from the great sinking of the Titanic, the 9% in the polls. One of the members is already smiling. He knows that he's on the right track. The member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh said he wasn't happy with everything in the budget. He spoke out. I give him a vote of confidence. I hope he's returned in their demise. And Phil McNeely, the member for Ottawa-Orléans called the budget "brutal." You can almost feel the gravity of that word, "brutal." He knew. He may have been talking about the chiropractors, because they know how brutal this really is.

But Kim Craitor has been on every side of every issue since he started. I don't know where he is. He demands that McGuinty restore the coverage for health care services slashed. This was on the Niagara Falls—actually, the opening of the casino, the big bank-robbery event, is happening tomorrow in Niagara Falls, so button up your back pocket and attend the event.

Tonight here, I must say this. The Liberal whip told chiropractors—I have thousands of petitions. I was not allowed to read them today, for the record. I intend to read every single one. The Liberal whip told chiropractors that he felt their pain—he should have had an adjustment right then and there—and suggested McGuinty would revisit the decision. I offer him the opportunity tonight to stand in his place and simply call for public hearings—more real consultation. It's not that hard. Take your time. We're here to listen. We care. We feel the pain too.

Our constituents are outraged. I met with them on Friday night. I listened to chiropractors, about 30 were there, and they worked all day. Many of them were men and women from a very professional background. I could tell by the sensitivity with which they spoke how they care about their patients. They really do. And they're now concerned that they're going to have to lower their fees. I'm concerned. Marie Bountrogianni, who's now a minister, will be fighting to lower the premiums. She's here tonight and she feels the pain. It's in that sentiment that I, reluctantly, because they won't listen to us, move adjournment of debate.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This is a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2039 to 2109.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 11; the nays are 30.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Further debate?

Mr O'Toole: Once again, there's evidence here that they are bullying the opposition. They've tried to stifle the comments I've made, but this speaks on behalf of Dr James Hadden, bachelor of science, doctor of chiropractic. I met with him on Friday, June 4. They're outraged by the delisting of access to public health care.

Mr Yakabuski: Their patients are outraged, John.

Mr O'Toole: The patients are just the victims of this whole circumstance. But in the very limited time, while I've been stifled, I want to indicate three parts of their budget that are clearly evidence of questionable accounting practices.

I refer to their budget, page 70: $1.6 billion in health tax; the unusual treatment of the $4 billion in the CHST transfer from the federal government, not in-year; and the more tragic tax treatment of the electricity, which the consumers of Ontario will soon see arrive in their bill.

I am outraged that they won't listen. They won't listen. They've refused to have the referendum. Now they're refusing to have public hearings. We've heard from the member for Trinity-Spadina, and it's in this spirit of outrage that I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Durham has moved the adjournment of the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I declare that the nays have it.

Call in the members; a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2112 to 2142.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr O'Toole has moved adjournment of the House.

All those in favour will stand and remain standing.

All those opposed will stand and remain standing.

Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 9; the nays are 31.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

The member for Durham.

Mr O'Toole: It's with sadness that I speak because I feel bullied, humbled and bullied, by the Liberals, who promised one thing during the election and after the election—we know the rest of the story. We know that Tony Ruprecht and his friends will ram this through and silence the voice of the people of Ontario.

Dr James Hadden said it best when he said that denying access is downloading to their patients. You should be ashamed of yourselves.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. It's time for questions and comments.

Mr Marchese: I just want to congratulate the member from Durham. And I've got to say to him, we have a lot in common—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Marchese: And let me tell you what we have in common, and it might not be a lot, but what he's requesting and what we're requesting are hearings. We have that in common.

I remember Jim Bradley, Dwight Duncan, now the Minister of Energy, and all of the others—you remember, Dwight? We would never allow the Conservatives to get away with not having hearings, and we would be obstructionist, you and us together. So what we're asking of you is what we asked of them.

This is a budget.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Do you miss us over there?

Mr Marchese: This is a budget, Marie, and you want the budget to get out there and be debated, and not for the public to tell you what they think so much as for you to tell them what you think. It's about you. I am doing this to help you out so that you can defend your budget so eloquently, as you're doing in this House, out there with the public, so you can tell them how they will have vaccinations and so many other good things. Yes, between hard choices, you had to get rid of a couple of things, but it's not so bad; good heavens. Taking away physiotherapy, chiropractic services, optometry: It's not so bad. You can defend it. I know that you can, because you are so, so articulate and so eloquent. Please, don't refuse yourselves the thrill, the pleasure, of defending yourself in public, with public hearings.

That's what we're asking. That's why we're ringing bells, together with the Tories, ringing bells in protest, because you refuse to have public meetings. That we have in common.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I am pleased to respond to this. Let's look at some history. The Harris-Eves government had 16 budget bills. How many of them had public hearings? None. Harris-Eves time-allocated 13 out of 16 budget bills. No committee hearings. No third reading debate.

The Harris-Eves government used time allocation more than any government in the history of this province or this country. In the case of the Eves government, 92% of the time they used time allocation. Under Mr Harris, it was 86%. Has the McGuinty government used it yet? No.

Who says we're not going to have committee hearings on the budget bill before us? You've been saying that; we've never said that at all, and we had an extensive consultation before the budget. You don't want to talk about the budget because you don't want to talk about a government that's dealing with the $5.6-billion deficit you left, with the 39 hospitals you closed, with the doctors you let go.

To my friend Mr Marchese, you time-allocated the social contract. You're a phony. You're full of hot air. You're so full of hot air, you could float around the world in 89 days, not 90 days. You time-allocated the Rae Days. You didn't consult when you didn't keep any of your election promises. You broke your auto insurance policy. Hydro rates went up 43% under your government. You cut medical school enrolment 10%, and we're feeling the impact of that today.

It's good to see the two of you getting along together. You know why? Because you were both failed governments. We had 13 lost years with those governments. We're cleaning up your mess, we're doing away with your hot air and we're fixing health care and education, more than you ever could do.

Mr Yakabuski: It's good to see the Minister of Energy so animated and worked up this evening. He must have been hooked up to one of the generating units at Nanticoke this afternoon.

One of the very significant points that needs to be made is that this party said things were going to change, things were going to be different: "We're going to usher in a new era of democratic renewal." Well, that's just another broken promise.

But do you know what's happened with those broken promises? The people in Ontario are not very happy. They're not very happy. Nine per cent of the people think Dalton McGuinty's doing a good job but, in fact, a Toronto Sun-Decima poll says that 4% of the people in Ontario say they're happy with the budget. Mind you, that same 4% said they enjoy a bout with kidney stones.

However, where did these people get their advice? Where did they get their advice?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, Minister.

Mr Yakabuski: Who told them this is what the people wanted? Four per cent are happy with the budget; 52% feel the budget is from bad to terrible. That's quite a

range to be in: bad to terrible. That's really encouraging, isn't it?

2150

So this is what we get now, the Minister of Energy talking about history when this party said they were going to change history: "We're going do things differently. We're going to give MPPs an enhanced role." Look at the MPPs over there. They're here in the Legislature because it's safer. They don't want to go to their ridings and try to sell this budget, because the people are on—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Prue: I'm going to try to tone it down just a little bit, and I'm probably going to make the Tories angry for the first one minute here. I have to tell you, part of the reason I first ran in the by-election when I came to this House was because we couldn't take it any more. The people of Toronto couldn't take it any more about the downloading. We couldn't take it any more about the amalgamations. We couldn't take it any more about the schools or the hospitals. We couldn't take it any more about what this government was doing. I will tell you, I came here to fight them with all my heart.

Now, for the last minute, I have to tell you that what disappoints me is that many of you are acting exactly the same way that these guys did. They would not hold public hearings. They time-allocated everything. They did stuff that would not allow this Legislature to act in a proper fashion.

All that is being asked here today is a very simple thing, and all I am hoping that this new government will do is to be different from the Tories. Be different from them. Just go out and ask the real people the real questions. Just go out to committee, even if it's only for a week, even if you don't travel outside this building. Actually listen to what real people have to say about this budget and do the unthinkable, do the absolutely politically unthinkable, that is, make some changes in this budget if you, after consulting the people, think those changes ought to be made.

Hon Mr Duncan: How many days of committee hearings did you have on the social contract?

Mr Prue: I don't know what you're talking about, Dwight. I never know what you're talking about. You are so irrelevant to this place, so irrelevant that no one ever knows what you're talking about. You stand up and you bluster. Well, I'm going to tell you, do the right thing that a party should do, and we will remember it. Be like the Tories and you'll end up like the Tories: out of here.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Durham has two minutes to reply.

Mr O'Toole: It is a sad, sad day for democracy.

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: Actually, Mr Speaker, I feel bullied. I feel intimidated because I'm being bullied; they're attempting to be intimidating.

I'd like to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina because he had it right. He said it in his own remarks. He said we could solve this amicably and peacefully simply by having real public hearings. Many members on the government side know you've done the wrong thing. You've acted hastily.

The member from Windsor-St Clair, as the House leader, knows you're time-allocating, in any language, this budget bill, this draconian piece of legislation.

As to the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, you have to get a copy of his remarks. It's worth repeating.

To the member from Beaches-East York: In all sincerity, I know their hearts are in the right place, even though they had to time-allocate the social contract. I know that.

Mr Prue: I wasn't here.

Mr O'Toole: He was the mayor of East York at the time, but he was behind it in spirit.

My humble submission tonight, and I mean this most sincerely, is that you listen to the people who are knocking on your doors and e-mailing you. Some of you have stood on principle. Some of you should recognize that we're all here to make a difference. Stand and ask—all we ask for is public hearings. You promised a referendum. You promised many things, 230 promises, but what you've failed to deliver is real democracy, real change.

I appeal to you tonight to listen to the chiropractors, not just from Durham. You've denied people access to health care, optometry—the list is endless, and I'm going to be against this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Churley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am going to bring the level and the tone of the debate way down.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Churley: Of course, people expect me not to yell or be partisan in any way.

Interjections.

Ms Churley: Do you see what's happened already, just to say it like it is?

I don't know if I've ever quoted my daughter in this place before, because I know what people will say.

Interjection: Because she lives in Newfoundland.

Ms Churley: No, she lives here in Toronto. She's the mother of three kids and she stays at home with the kids. Her partner is a renovator, a very skilled renovator and carpenter. She's an at-home mom. They decided that it made more sense for her to stay at home with the kids than to pay for child care for three of them. We all know what that's like. They're having a pretty tough time.

I'm using my daughter, and I know it's a bit risky because you will expect that she's going to be somewhat partisan. But I have to say this to you: My daughter is not all that involved in politics. She pays attention and she's there for me on election day, but she doesn't have a great deal of comment about it overall.

I checked my voice mail on my cellphone the other day. It was my daughter and she sounded very agitated. I'm going to quote her because I think it reflects what a lot of people in her family's position are feeling these days. I'm going leave out some of the more, shall I say,

descriptive words in her quote—they're probably unparliamentary—but here's what she said:

"I was watching the legislative channel," and there was a great deal of passion and anger in her voice. "You get those"—fill in the blank there. "It so pisses me off. The PCs screwed me over as a single mother"—

The Deputy Speaker: No, no. I don't think you should quote something that you wouldn't normally say in this place.

Ms Churley: I say "pissed off" all the time.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, member from Toronto-Danforth, I happen not to appreciate it, so I'd ask that you use more—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, order.

I'd ask that you use more temperate language.

Ms Churley: I must tell you that that's the way I'm feeling. She went on to say: "The PCs screwed me over as a single mother struggling to make it, and now the Liberals are screwing me and my family over"—

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Toronto-Danforth, you're pushing the envelope. I'm asking you to use parliamentary language.

Ms Churley: Mr Speaker, this is—

The Deputy Speaker: I'm not here to debate you.

Ms Churley: I'm not saying it any more, Mr Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm warning the member from Toronto-Danforth.

Ms Churley: Excuse me, but this is the way people are feeling out there, Mr Speaker. What my daughter said—and she doesn't normally talk like that—is reflective of how angry and upset people are feeling out there after eight years of these guys. She was a single mother, who felt every day the impact of those policies on her, and now she's with a family and she's struggling to make it.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, you're not helping.

Ms Churley: She's describing how she feels. Let me tell you, that is the tone of most of the people, and worse.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We're going to tone it down or we're going to take a little break. One or the other, OK? The member for Toronto-Danforth.

Ms Churley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. That is the tone, and you should listen carefully to this. You think it's unparliamentary language. Well, perhaps it's—

The Deputy Speaker: Member, you don't have to yell at me. I told you, we're going to have to tone this down just a hair. You said you were going to tone it down; I'm asking you to do that.

Ms Churley: Mr Speaker, I am speaking in my style.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I'll take that under consideration.

Ms Churley: We'll all be watching carefully. Mr Speaker, the tone of the rest of the debate and how that goes.

I am trying to tell the Liberals here, using my daughter as an example. She is the mother of three, with a family that is struggling, thinking that here we have a new government and that things were going to be better for them. If I sound angry, I am angry, and I have a right to express that in this place. I most certainly do.

What I'm trying to demonstrate here, as graphically as possible, is that my daughter, her partner and the three kids are struggling to make it on one salary. He's self-employed and doesn't have benefits. They struggle. They're making do. They get by from month to month. It was quite a shock for them to have this government come forward with a budget that actually—let me use a more parliamentary word—whacks them once again, if that is parliamentary enough for this place.

Let me go back to why I am so angry. I remember that before the election, Janet Ecker, the then Tory Minister of Finance, held a press conference in this place because there were a lot of rumours and discussions out there about a large Tory deficit, which we all knew about. I remember going to that press conference. I'm no accountant, but even I, looking between the lines of that budget, could see that there was at least a $5-billion hidden deficit, and I went out and said that to the press.

Now, let me tell you something. If I could figure out, by reading between the lines, that it was at least a $5-billion deficit, I would imagine that the finance critic and others from the Liberal Party could figure it out. I'm going to quote to you here:

"Before the election, McGuinty Liberals predicted Ontario would ring up big budget and structural deficits. On June 3, 2003, then Liberal finance critic Gerry Phillips told the standing committee on estimates, 'We're adding up the risks associated with this [2003-04] budget, and we've come to ... $5 billion.'

"Phillips also forecasted Ontario's structural deficit. 'Billions of dollars of off-book debt are piling up on school boards, hospitals, universities, colleges and nursing home owners,' he wrote in the June 7, 2002, edition of his Treasury Watch newsletter. 'The province has guaranteed to pay the principal and interest, but there is at least $5 billion of fairly new debt that does not show up on the province's books.'"

Mr Speaker, that is why I'm so angry. New Democrats, in the election, told the truth. We said there was going to be an at least $5-billion deficit and that the only way to start reinvesting in the programs that we in this party all support, reinvesting in the programs of this province—we made it clear that we knew there had to be some tax increases. We said the truth in the election, and that it should come off the higher-income people, who, after all, got over a 30% tax decrease from the previous government. There were a number of things we said we would do that wouldn't whack people like my daughter and her family and the middle-income and poor people of this province.

Having said all of that, on behalf of my daughter, Astra, and her partner, Chris, and the three kids, Savanna, James, and Kerin, I'm now going to move that we adjourn the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms Churley has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2203 to 2233.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms Churley has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour will stand and remain standing, please.

All those opposed will stand and remain standing.

Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 9; the nays are 29.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated. The member for Toronto-Danforth.

Ms Churley: Speaker, you wanted me to reflect on some of my earlier comments, and I did that. But I think I need a little bit more time to reflect. So therefore, I move adjournment of the House.

Interjections.

Ms Churley: Thank me. Get out there quick. Five minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms Churley has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2235 to 2305.

The Deputy Speaker: Ms Churley has moved adjournment of the House.

All those in favour will please stand and remain standing.

All those opposed will stand and remain standing.

Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 9; the nays are 27.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Is there time? The member for Toronto-Danforth

Ms Churley: While I was reflecting on my earlier comments, I was watching the end of the hockey game. I have to say that we're very sad. Calgary just lost. I don't know, Speaker, if you had an opportunity to leave the chair and see, but they lost. But we do want to congratulate both teams on games well played. It was a pleasure to see all the great hockey being played up until tonight. Again, I just want to congratulate Calgary—yay, team—for playing a good game. There you go.

I'm looking forward now to getting into baseball, which for me is more of a spring-summer kind of game anyway. It's kind of weird playing hockey in the middle of summer, with the weather in Florida, what, over 80 degrees or something.

Mr Speaker, I will have an opportunity to have a few more comments about the bill before us in my two-minute summary.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): It is sad that Calgary didn't bring home the cup, as they say.

There is another point I must make in this debate. I heard the member from Toronto-Danforth as she spoke and began the debate on this bill, and I have to say that her use of unparliamentary language, as a grandmother, I found quite offensive. In my opinion, this is not a place where we use that type of language. Dramatics is what it's used for, not to really debate the issues, unfortunately.

The rhetoric, that kind of conduct in this place has to change. If we want to make this place more relevant, it's time we stop the theatrics and start dealing with facts, and we should debate based on facts. We can agree to disagree, but we don't have to use those kinds of theatrics. I think the public is sick and tired of that, and I think it debases all of us in this place. I would suggest that we reflect on the way we behave in this House and not use theatrics and that kind of language here. I believe there's a reason it's called unparliamentary language. If you are in this place and you've been elected to represent your constituents, you should behave that way. I was really disappointed to hear the member from Toronto-Danforth use that kind of language.

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments on the comments of the member for Toronto-Danforth.

2310

The member for Sarnia-Lambton mentioned that people are sick and tired of unparliamentary language or whatever, but I'll tell you what they're really sick and tired of. They're sick and tired of broken promises. We've set a record in this province, in this country, for Liberal broken promises since October 2 of last year.

We're ringing these bells tonight, and I know the people of the province probably aren't happy with the bells ringing, but we could quit ringing the bells right now if we could agree to have committee hearings this summer. That's all we're asking for. This government talks about their consultation process talking to all the people in the province. Now, no one in the province of Ontario heard anything about a health premium, other than Paul Martin in his secret calls to Dalton McGuinty. The fact of the matter is, let's go on the road and see what the people of Ontario think about the health premium, what they think about the delisting of health care services. That's all we're asking for. The people in Kenora, Timmins, Toronto, Ottawa, Kitchener, wherever, all want to hear more and want to comment on the health care premiums, not in one day downstairs.

That's what the people of Ontario are sick and tired of: broken promises. If you can't have the committee hearings, what should we have? I think we should go back to the Taxpayer Protection Act and have a referendum. I wonder how well the Liberals would do in a referendum. If Dalton McGuinty is doing 9%, it would fail and the government would come down.

Ms Horwath: It's been a week now since I was sworn in, and I have to say that I really appreciate very much the comments raised by my colleague Marilyn Churley. I was quite surprised, actually. I'm trying to get a handle, a

grip on exactly what is and what isn't unparliamentary language. I've heard a lot of language in this Legislature, Mr Speaker, and I'm trying to figure out where the rules are. I'm learning. I'm a bit of a newbie here, and I'll admit that. But I have to tell you that I've heard many, many people quoting others and reading from statements, many other people who happen to be of a different gender than the speaker who spoke earlier. I can't quite figure it out. I can't quite figure out how the comments of my colleague were not parliamentary when I've heard other language that was far worse. I just need to understand that. Perhaps I will ask the Clerk's office to help clarify that for me, because quite frankly, it seems a little bit of a bias in terms of how people are interpreting whether something is or isn't appropriate language. Nonetheless, I'll leave that and I'll get some clarification on that myself at another time, Mr Speaker.

But the anger reflected in the comments made by my colleague is quite clearly what's being spoken and felt and what's being dealt with, actually, by the federal cousins of this government on the campaign trail. That anger and frustration is out there. It's loud and clear. It's ticking people off left, right and centre. The taxes in this budget are brutal. They're hurting those most unable to afford these taxes, and it's totally inappropriate. Ms Churley was right on the mark.

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I'm happy to speak tonight, at this very late hour, in favour of our budget. I ran last October because I was a municipal politician who had lost faith in our provincial government. I was disillusioned and so disappointed with my representation that it forced me to run.

I am pleased today to say that I'm supporting our budget because it does what I tried to do as a municipal councillor. It speaks to a four-year plan. This is a novel way of doing budgeting in this House, I gather, to have a long-term plan, a vision, to have plans that incorporate all sectors and that have thoughtful, measured steps in place to ensure that our health care and education are protected for the future.

I ran because I felt that the past government didn't care about the things I care about. I feel comfortable with this budget, and I know that when I had my budget open house after Mr Sorbara launched his budget, a lot of people came in and said to me, "I know why you did this, and I'm pleased with the choices you've made. They're tough choices, but I believe in them." Many people were relieved just to actually talk to their member of Parliament. It's clear that in the past, provincial members weren't available, didn't make themselves accessible.

We are a different kind of government. Our budget shows that. We're transparent, we're accountable, and I'm proud of this budget. It's a tough choice, but I'm not here to make popular choices; I'm here to make the right choices for the province to ensure its strength for the future. I'm pleased to support it here today at this very late hour.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Toronto-Danforth has two minutes to reply.

Ms Churley: I want to thank all those who gave comments in response to my incendiary comments from before. Quite frankly, I was surprised and didn't mean to offend. I guess I talk like that. Those who know me—mother, grandmother, MPP—know I'm a fighter and I tell it like it is and I use strong language from time to time. Frankly, I didn't think that was very strong language, and I have to say you've heard worse.

What I'm doing is standing up for my daughter and her family and all those others out there who need people like me to stand up and speak clearly and strongly to reflect how angry and how upset they really are about what's happened to them, because they really can't afford this extra cost. Liberals stand up, Mr Speaker—I know you're one too and have to struggle with this as well—and say, "We had to make a choice. It was a tough choice, but it was the right choice." It was the wrong choice. That's what's really bothering me. We recognized and said in the election campaign that there needed to be a reinvestment, but why saddle the lower- and middle-income people, who can't afford it, with this extra cost?

If the Liberals are so proud of their budget, as they have said tonight time and time again, why not take it out to public hearings and give people an opportunity to tell them directly what they think? And if the Liberals are so proud of parts of their budget that they say they're not getting out there and communicating very well, what an opportunity to get out there and communicate. Clearly, they are afraid to go out and communicate this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Leal: I rise in the House tonight to address Bill 83. I stand in support of this legislation for many reasons, reasons that I see every day in my riding of Peterborough.

I can say with confidence that this legislation will improve the quality of life for the residents of my riding. This legislation will invest in and sustain Ontario's infrastructure.

I look forward to the day when the 20,000 Peterborough residents who don't have a family doctor will have access to a physician. I look forward to the day that those people won't have to rely on Peterborough Regional Health Centre's emergency department for primary care. I look forward to the very near future when Peterborough residents won't have to wait for cardiac procedures and cancer care.

Peterborough has the third-largest senior population in Ontario. I look forward to seeing the seniors of Peterborough get better access to home care. I also look forward to seeing conditions in our long-term-care facilities improve.

All of these things and much more will be accomplished under this budget. It's a grand vision, but it's a necessary vision. It's one that can be achieved.

I am proud to say that part of this vision has been developed in my riding. As I mentioned before, Peterborough has faced a doctor shortage for some time now. Until now, there was a lot of talk but not much action

from politicians and government. I am pleased to see that this government is not sitting idly by. It is taking action. It is stepping up to the plate.

In the Romanow report, it was suggested that primary care undergo major reform. In Peterborough we're fortunate to have a group of enterprising physicians and health care stakeholders who have taken a proactive approach, putting together a primary care reform model. This model is being used to help develop family health teams. These teams will provide Ontarians with access to a number of health care professionals in one location. One hundred and fifty family health teams will be established within four years. This will allow round-the-clock access for Ontarians who don't have a family doctor.

2320

I know health care is a number one priority for Ontarians, but we can't lose sight of the other initiatives this budget presents.

My riding is made up of a fairly even split between urban and rural constituents. I have heard from rural residents who often feel disconnected and overlooked because of the focus on urban centres. This legislation recognizes farmers' needs. Twenty million dollars in funding will help farmers comply with Nutrient Management Act requirements. I am also pleased to see that this bill will move forward with the government's pledge to set up a $900-million rural infrastructure fund in partnership with municipalities and the federal government. These investments will help small towns and rural communities comply with drinking water standards, improve sewage treatment and waste management, fix local roads and repair bridges, as well as help address other health and safety priorities. The province will work closely with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to implement the program, as well as ensure it meets local priorities.

All together, Bill 83 would allow for $3 billion in improvements to Ontario's infrastructure. In partnership with this is the commitment to put two cents a litre of the gas tax toward public transit in urban areas. Getting people out of their cars and on to buses and rail links will improve air quality for all of us.

Nearly 10,000 of my constituents commute to the greater Toronto area on a daily basis. Developing inter-urban transit that keeps our roads free from traffic jams is of great importance. People are spending between three and four hours a day in their vehicles. This is time that would be better spent at home with their family and friends.

This legislation brings with it a commitment to create a GO bus link from Peterborough to Oshawa. I can't convey enough the importance of this vital transportation link. As I mentioned before, this will lend itself to improving our air quality. As we head into summer, we're all well aware of the number of smog days we experience. It will also lessen the stress levels of those who must sit in slow traffic every day.

I have only touched briefly on a number of items within this budget bill. I'll reiterate my support for this bill and the many benefits for Ontarians and Peterborough residents it will produce. I think it's a forward-looking budget document, a document that addresses both the fiscal deficit and the social deficit we've seen over the last eight and five years, 13 years in total, in the province of Ontario. This budget document will see this province move ahead with steady, sustained progress.

I'm sharing my time with the member from Ottawa Centre, Mr Patten.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): In the few minutes I have to comment on our Liberal budget—because that's what it is when you examine the way in which governments spend money: Look at where they spend money and look at where they emphasize the allocation of their resources.

Before this budget was presented—there's a history to all this. I want to remind my colleagues of the context of North America, this evangelical fanaticism and ideological position on cutting taxes: "We will cut taxes and improve services," and it never happens. You see this out of the Republican Party in the last three successive governments. In each case, it has been the Democratic Party that has been able to refocus and deal with that particular budget.

At the federal level, we had the same thing with Mulroney, a massive debt that Paul Martin had to deal with, and he did, in seven successive budgets. I hope people recognize that.

Then we had here the Harris-Eves group, who said the same thing. At the end of the day, what did we find? It wasn't the same thing, and as a government we faced dealing with a fiscal burden.

It's in that context—and you're right: They were very hard, very difficult choices. But I want to point out that this particular budget, which I'm very proud to be associated with, recognizes—here are some of the important things:

It recognizes for the first time and allows 115,000 additional senior Ontarians to have home care. It stops the closing of hospitals. It stops the cutting of welfare rates and actually adds a sum, a humble sum, mind you, but it's moving in the direction of recognizing that people were living with poor resources. It deals with the not giving of an increase for ODSP or those on disability pensions, even by an inflation factor, for eight or nine years, and this budget begins to do that.

Responsible government deals with the tough issues at hand by making difficult choices. When you're faced with the kinds of choices we have, it seems to me, in my vernacular, do you want to spend four years claiming you balanced the budget while you literally had to decrease services in every single area? We've already flatlined 15 ministries for the next four years. We would literally have had to cut health care and we would have had to cut education. That's not why we chose to run individually or collectively. We wanted to fix some of those things that were in sorry shape.

So we chose to do what I believe is the right thing, and that was to say, you know what? If we're going to be booted out, I'd rather be booted out saying we stood for trying to deal with the frail people in our society, the people who have special needs in our society, the people who haven't had a break in our society, strengthening our health care and strengthening our education.

Education has got to be the most important investment we make in the future of our society, given the nature of how economies are moving and looking at what happened: a 40% increase in the last eight years or five years in private school education openings and a drop in attendance in the public school systems. Why? Because people lost faith and trust in the quality of that. They could see the government was not supporting public education.

Our number one, number two priority is public education. We stand for it, we'll put the bucks behind it and we'll make sure our kids do a heck of a lot better. We'll make sure, by doing what? By supporting smaller classes, by supporting more teachers, by making sure we do away with the crumbling schools we have. There was an announcement made last week that provided $200 million and that levers $2.1 billion to try and put back into shape an infrastructure that was completely ignored by the previous government.

I say shame on you for that. We're going to restrengthen education, health care, the environment and a whole variety of other things. I believe that, at the end of day, the people of Ontario will see that it turned out to be the right decision because it was good for the people of Ontario, it was good for our children and good for all of us.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired. Questions and comments?

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Give me a break. There is not a single tough decision in this entire budget. There's nothing difficult about increasing spending precipitously. It's raining money out there. Every kind of spending commitment you could make, you've made it and then some.

I reference it in James Wallace's column today, where he talks about the incredible increase in spending under Dalton McGuinty in his first—there's not a tough decision in that. Raising taxes on middle-class families: That's the coward's way out; that's the easy way out. Twelve hundred bucks for working families in the province of Ontario because you can't set priorities, you can't make a decision.

Dalton McGuinty couldn't make a tough decision if his life depended on it. The guy can't decide if he wants sunny side up or over easy. It takes him months to make that decision. It took him, what, seven, eight months before he decided what his fiscal approach was going to be.

Witness the Oak Ridges moraine. He said, "I'm making a tough decision. I'm drawing a line in the sand." He said that two or three times. A week later, he flip-flopped. He backed down. Dalton McGuinty came forward and said, "We're putting a line in the sand," when it comes to negotiating with the unions. They talked about Dalton Days. Then Sid Ryan and OPSEU came forward and Dalton McGuinty went into the fetal position and backed down as fast as he could.

There is not a single tough decision in this budget. If you want to make a tough decision, I say to my colleagues across the floor, if you want to stand up for what I know your constituents are saying, come by tomorrow, vote in support of Mrs Witmer's resolution. Stand up for your constituents who support chiropractic care, who support physiotherapy, who support eye exams. It's a simple question. It's not a confidence motion. Yes or no, where do you stand? Do you stand behind your promises, behind your constituents or are you going to be whipped in line by Andrew Steele and his troops in the Premier's office. Let's find out tomorrow.

2330

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Beaches-East York.

Interjection.

Mr Prue: Yes, it could be.

To the members from Peterborough and Ottawa Centre, I listened quite carefully to what you had to say, and quite frankly, some of what you started out to say makes sense. Everyone needs to look at the allocation of resources. You had to look at the allocation of resources and you found them wanting. There is no question you would find them wanting after eight years of Tory government, absolutely none.

You talked about the history of other places around North America, the history of Republicans in the United States. Yes, we know it took Democratic governments, and I agree with you, to come to the rescue of the people of that country. You also talked about the history of Mulroney. One cannot fault you on your historical analysis of Mulroney or the history of Harris-Eves.

But what you forgot to say—and here's where I come to the point. You forgot to talk about the whole Paul Martin government or era of federal politics in Canada. You forgot to talk about the cutbacks he made to health care, which have been disastrous in Ontario. You forgot to talk about the cutbacks to child care, which have been disastrous in Ontario. You forgot to talk about all the cutbacks he made in order to balance the budget and run huge budget surpluses for all those years. He has been part of the problem as well, and if you're going to talk about the history, you cannot talk about the history without naming him.

The most important thing you have forgotten is that you signed the taxpayers' protection pledge in front of thousands and millions of people. You made that pledge, and you should never have made that pledge. If you're here today because of this, you're hoist with your own petard, because you got too greedy and because you wanted to promise something you knew you could never, ever deliver.

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I want to say off the top that I'm not going to move to adjourn the debate or the House, even if I could, so there we go.

Mr O'Toole: Do it.

Ms Mossop: No, I couldn't. I'm not going to do it. If we're here to debate this until midnight, then we're going to get on with it and debate it. We're not going to sit around and listen to bells any more. Besides, the hockey game is over anyway, so there we go. We're stuck here.

One of the things I want to point out is that the good thing that's coming out of all this is we know for absolute sure and certain that we're not going to ever have to go through all this process again in Ontario, because we're making sure we don't have to do that.

We have already passed new legislation that gives the Provincial Auditor sweeping new powers to look into every corner of the government, including crown corporations. They will open those books to the public, to the voters, before the next election. In addition to that, we know when that next election is going to be. It's going to be on October 4, 2007.

So the voters, the people who hire and fire the people in this room, will have the full story before they go to the polls, and they won't have some big surprise. They won't have a politician saying, "Are the political winds blowing in my direction, should we go for an election now or later?" and then go, "Oh goodness, there's a Provincial Auditor's report coming. We better call the election before that. How about a month before that?" The voters go blindly into it, thinking everything is peachy keen. However, those voters were a pretty wise lot and they turfed the Tories out anyway. They kind of had a sixth sense about that.

The point is that the Tories weren't turfed out because they couldn't balance a budget—even though they couldn't balance a budget—but they were turfed out because they did such a horrendous job of running this government and this province. It's as simple as that. They decimated public services. They destroyed health care. They created an era of uncertainty. People couldn't rely on anything, including the water coming out of their taps. That's why they got turfed out.

Mr O'Toole: I was surprised and somewhat bewildered by the member for Peterborough. He should stand and acknowledge the work done by Gary Stewart. He should acknowledge it. Get over it. We understand you won.

The member for Ottawa Centre, whom I have the greatest respect for because he didn't even vote for the last motion, was a member of cabinet in the Peterson government. I'm disappointed more than he is—well, not more than he is—that he's not in cabinet today. But I'm more interested in what the member for Stoney Creek has to say because she brings the reason of the media to it all, but other things as well.

I think what's being avoided here is the real debate about the—Mr Speaker, may I use the term "obfuscation," "deception"? Which one of them? During the election, I remember the member in my riding standing in his place with a million-dollar ad saying "We'll not raise your taxes." I can never get over that. It's sort of like when Chrétien and Sheila Copps were saying, "We'll cancel the GST and free trade."

I've come to believe this: If you say "Liberal," you say—I can't say it in the House. But the people in the riding of Durham know full well that all we're asking for, in a reasonable tone, a respectful tone, is to have public hearings. The people want a voice. You've deprived them of access to government.

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: Well, I understand, but I'm sending a copy to them, member from Niagara, the Minister of Tourism.

I respect the work he's done. When he was in opposition, he was always on our back, but I could always trust him to have a petition every single day. He usually wrote it.

Have hearings on the issue—

The Deputy Speaker: Will the member take his seat. Thank you.

The member for Toronto-Danforth has two minutes to reply.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: Yes, again. I'm still reflecting.

The people of Ontario are in a fury, and no matter how much you try to bury your heads in the sand and say, "No, no, it's not that bad," they understand. They're in a fury because people who make $30,000 a year are going to see their provincial taxes go up by some 24%, and those making about $200,000 are seeing their taxes going up only 3%. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out why people are upset.

Interjection: She's got a point.

Ms Churley: I do have a very good point.

The other thing I want to point out to the Liberal members who just spoke is that nobody is talking about certain other aspects of the budget. But people should be aware—and this is why we need public hearings—that certain aspects of the budget aren't being discussed. It's really, really scary.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: How about I give the member for Toronto-Danforth an extra opportunity to speak? We'll have the reply from either the member from Ottawa Centre or the member from Peterborough.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Peterborough.

Mr Leal: I want to thank the members for Ottawa Centre, Erie-Lincoln, Beaches-East York, Stoney Creek and my good friend the member for Durham for their delightful insights in terms of our budget.

But let me say this. We're using the health care premiums to create targets in Ontario, to reduce waiting lists for joint replacements, cardiac care and cancer care. It's the first time, I think, in a very long time in this province that a government has actually set out a framework with targets to achieve those goals. I think it's a very important thing to do for many people who are looking for leadership to establish targets in these particular areas.

I recall my good friend from Simcoe North, who made a very eloquent address a short time ago, supporting the

apprenticeship training component of our budget. He was positive, he was enthusiastic and thought it was a great thing. We're looking for his support when we come to the final budget debate, because I know he likes that part of the budget.

But the economy is telling the tale on how well this budget has been accepted. In the month of May—I'm going to repeat; I hope they're listening: 30,800 new jobs: 30,000 full-time, 800 part-time, 9,200 in the key area of manufacturing. That shows that there's confidence in this budget, confidence in the province of Ontario and that people have confidence that we're moving forward with a positive program for Peterborough and for the whole province.

But I want to look at a couple of things. It's the first time in many years that we're starting to help the disabled and the disadvantaged in the province of Ontario. I remember in 1993 when the government of Bob Rae said to people on ODSP, "Zap, you're frozen." We're fixing that—

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Further debate?

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise to speak on the second reading of Bill 83. I think it's important that we point out again to the government what's very important to our caucus, and I'm pretty sure to the NDP caucus as well: that the citizens of Ontario are expecting, and we're expecting, committee hearings throughout the summer on this piece of legislation. We think public hearings are a necessity.

With that, Mr Speaker, I'd like to move adjournment of the debate of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Adjournment of the debate? Now, which? Adjournment of the debate?

Mr Dunlop: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Dunlop has moved adjournment of the debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Orders of the day. No?

Hon Mr Duncan: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The government House leader has moved adjournment of the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock Tuesday, June 8.

The House adjourned at 2342.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 8 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 8 juin 2004

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RELAY FOR LIFE

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): This past weekend, I had the honour of participating in the Canadian Cancer Society Renfrew county unit's Relay for Life, which was held at Canadian Forces Base Petawawa. When the final numbers are tallied, the total raised will exceed $300,000. These funds will be dedicated to cancer research and to local support and transportation services.

At this year's event, 140 teams participated and 228 cancer survivors took part in the victory lap. The most poignant part of the event was the luminary ceremony, during which Legion members and army cadets lit candles in memory of those who have lost their battle with this dreaded indiscriminate disease or in honour of a cancer survivor.

The generosity of the people of Renfrew county has once again made this one of the most successful events of its kind in the entire province.

I would like to thank all those who have given so much to make this possible, including the organizers, participants, volunteers and sponsors, with a special thank you to Lieutenant Colonel McBride and all the personnel at CFB Petawawa. With this dedication and determination, the fight will continue at home in Renfrew county and indeed everywhere, until that glorious day when we can rise and say, "Cancer has been beaten."

At this time I would also like to draw your attention to the members' gallery and welcome my wife, Vicky, who is attending a legislative session for the first time.

COLLINGWOOD COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to welcome three students to the Ontario Legislature. Kaley Reid, John Taylor and Josh Sanderson are all grade 12 students at Collingwood Collegiate Institute in my riding of Simcoe-Grey, and I'm pleased to have them here today as my guests.

A couple of weeks ago I was invited to the school by Sasha Helmkay, CCI student council president, who asked me to speak to her peers about Ontario's parliamentary tradition. It was an absolute pleasure to have this chance to meet with this group of talented and intelligent young people. The students ranged from 14 to 18 years of age, and I've got to tell you, they were a gifted and engaged audience. I want to take this opportunity to thank Sasha for inviting me to CCI and to congratulate her teacher, Mr Marty Wilkinson, who I know must be proud to lead such an exceptional group of fine young people.

It also gives me great pleasure to congratulate another former CCI student, Stacey Van Boxmeer of Collingwood, for her tremendous performance as the goalkeeper for the Canadian Women's Under-19 Soccer Team. Stacey is now a freshman at Indiana State University and a recent graduate of Collingwood Collegiate Institute. She played an integral role in Canada's 2-1 victory over the favoured US side on Sunday in the gold medal game.

This is quite an accomplishment for Canada. It points to the hard work and dedication of all members of the team, and especially Collingwood's Stacey Van Boxmeer.

Stacey, on behalf of the people of Simcoe-Grey and the people here, represented in this Parliament of Ontario, I want to thank you for being such a terrific representative of our community. Best wishes for future success.

NORTHEAST MENTAL HEALTH CENTRE

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): The Liberal government has failed the Northeast Mental Health Centre, its patients and staff. Despite repeated requests for financial help to cover the deficit and avoid program cuts and cancellations, the centre has not received any consideration from the government. As a result, children and adults in northeastern Ontario who suffer from mental illness and rely on the centre for help are at great risk.

Cuts to children's services include cancellation of mental health services for children aged zero to six living in Sudbury district east, Espanola and on Manitoulin Island; cancellation of mental health support for children living in CAS foster homes; and cancellation of the district day treatment program, which helps secondary students fighting addictions to finish high school. Services for children who are duly diagnosed with mental illness and developmental disabilities will be reduced, and the waiting list for pre-school speech and language services will grow from eight months to one year.

Adults will lose their community-based programs in Elliot Lake and Walden; counselling services will be reduced elsewhere in Manitoulin-Sudbury; the wait time will grow for seriously ill patients needing help from the ACT teams; and nine acute care beds on the hospital side of the centre will be left empty by the end of the fiscal year 2004-05.

This is a crisis, and the Liberal government hasn't responded. The government promised more funds for mental health services before the election and in the budget, but the centre hasn't received any money to stop the cuts. Patients suffering from mental illness are already vulnerable. The government must act now, so they are not put at even greater risk.

HEALTH CARE

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I rise today to talk about health care. In today's opposition motion debate—

Interjection.

Mr Wilkinson: —a number of relevant facts, Mr O'Toole, should not be forgotten. By 2003 the Tory health record included the following sorry facts: We had fewer nurses per capita than any other province in the Dominion; ninth out of 10 provinces for the number of family doctors per capita; eighth out of 10 provinces for health care expenditure per capita; and a gross fiscal mismanagement of the province's books that led to a deficit of $6.2 billion, which put all our social programs at risk.

Also not to be forgotten are the following comments. The former Premier, Mike Harris, said in the 1995 election, "I can guarantee you that it is not my plan to close hospitals." Then he closed or merged 36 hospitals.

He also referred to nurses as Hula Hoop workers and claimed the profession was outdated. Well, this wasn't true during the SARS outbreak, when nurses who worked for private agencies had to be brought in to cover shortages.

On two-tier health care, the former Premier, Mr Eves, said, "People should be able to buy their way to the front of the health care line." The Tories introduced P3 hospitals and approved five private MRI clinics and four private CT clinics.

The McGuinty government should be compared not to the Almighty, but to the opposition. We are investing heavily in public health and are rebuilding a public health care system all Ontarians can be proud of. We've made tough decisions in the best interests of all Ontarians, something the opposition can't say about themselves.

1340

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Today is the ninth anniversary of Mike Harris's first victory and of my first election to this House.

Our caucus learned very quickly that demonstrations and protests were not something that working families are usually inclined to attend. After all, working families are too busy raising a family, working in their community and working long hours to pay their bills. Yet Dalton McGuinty broke his promises to ordinary working families. He raised their taxes; then he broke his promise to uphold the taxpayer protection law.

Tomorrow, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is holding a rally on the Legislature steps to demand the referendum we were promised. That takes place at noon tomorrow. Speaker, I trust you will be there as well. Millions of Conservatives, New Democrats and even Liberals are in support of those who can be there, even if they can't be there in person. Over 100,000 people have already shown support by signing the CTF's petition at www.taxpayer.com. Many others have collected original signatures for my petition to be presented in this House, which can be downloaded from www.frank-klees.on.ca.

I hope everyone in this House will join us tomorrow at that rally, especially those Liberal MPPs who have so casually shown contempt for ordinary families.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): Today I have a message for thousands of people across Ontario who are termed internationally trained professionals but who cannot enter their chosen professions: Don't give up.

Almost half of the internationally trained professionals in Ontario are working in areas other than their chosen profession or are underemployed as professionals. The Ontario economy forgoes billions of dollars each year because of the unrecognized qualifications of this group.

After years of neglect under a very different government, and by working with Ontario occupational regulatory bodies, this government is pledged to reduce barriers by January 2005. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is personally committed to monitoring progress and reporting regularly to the House. The budget contained new investments for training of up to $12.5 million a year by 2005-06.

My message to the people of Ontario who are trained is, the barriers are coming down. My message is also for the government and for the regulators. It is urgent to make full use of this human capital before skills become eroded and people run out of the energy to battle any longer.

We can't place people specifically in jobs, but we can and we must finally remove from professions the barriers that do not protect the public interest. There are thousands of trained, willing and able people in our province who have been waiting too long for a fair chance.

This afternoon in room 228, from 5 to 7, internationally trained professionals will host a reception.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Confusion appears to be reigning in the Conservative caucus surrounding the provincial deficit. As a candidate in the

provincial election, I constantly heard the then-Premier, now the Leader of the Opposition, tell us, "Don't worry. The books are balanced." These words were echoed by every single Ernie Eves candidate on the campaign trail.

Following the election, respected former Provincial Auditor Erik Peters revealed that there was in fact a $5.6-billion deficit being kept under wraps. At that time, the Tories dismissed Peters as a Liberal consultant. Now, all of a sudden, the tune has changed. The member for Simcoe-Grey, for example, recently told this House that we should have known there was a deficit because of SARS and 9/11. "Ontario had a bad year," Tories are telling us, "You should have known."

Not only did they never say anything like that during the election, but their own public accounts, published in August 2003, after SARS, said, "The 2003-04 fiscal outlook is on track with the 2003 budget plan ... a balanced budget is projected, unchanged from the budget plan."

The people of Ontario see through this revisionist history. They want a government that will give them the straight goods. Our new Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act will require independently audited pre-election reports and make sure that kind of illusion is never again perpetrated on the people of Ontario.

LIZ LOGOZZO

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise today to recognize an extraordinary act of compassion. Liz Logozzo of Brampton is the mother of Sarah, Brianna and Julia. She is also a parent volunteer of Mother Mary Ward School in Brampton. She is in our audience.

Since January, Liz Logozzo has been battling breast cancer. Out of concern for her mother, Brianna and her grade 5 schoolmates raised $150 toward the Humber River Regional Hospital Foundation's chemotherapy clinic. The foundation has set a goal to raise $1 million for the expansion. As well, Liz's 11-year-old daughter, Sarah, and her classmates made 1,026 paper cranes as a symbol of hope after learning about an old Japanese legend. These paper cranes now hang from Liz Logozzo's ceiling and will remain there until she is completely recovered.

These initiatives not only demonstrate how important Liz Logozzo is to her community in Brampton, but the students at Mother Mary Ward are an example to us all of good citizenship. They are here today in the House to show their support. I believe I speak for this Legislature when I thank the staff at Mother Mary Ward School, Mrs Logozzo and her daughters Sarah, Brianna and Julia, who are sitting in the members' gallery, for their courage, compassion and strong example of citizenship.

NURSES

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): On behalf of my constituents in Scarborough Centre, I rise today tell you how proud I am of our government for taking yet another step in bringing substantial improvements for health care in Ontario.

On June 3, Minister Smitherman announced a $50-million strategy to help retain recent nursing graduates and experienced nurses in Ontario. Our province invests heavily in our youth, from junior kindergarten to graduate studies, and it is important to keep our young nursing professionals in this province.

This is a critical step for rebuilding health care in Ontario. This plan involves creating new positions in hospitals and long-term-care facilities for young nurses while allowing them to mentor with more experienced nurses. It will also allow nursing schools to buy clinical training equipment so their students are better prepared for the workforce. Finally, it will enable us to find new roles for late-career nurses who have been injured on the job. This will allow them to move to less physically demanding tasks while taking advantage of their skills and knowledge. Not only do we need the bright, energetic initiative of new nursing grads, but we also need the knowledge of experienced nursing staff to help to maintain a strong health care system for all Ontarians.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Mr Gerretsen moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 92, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 / Projet de loi 92, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Gerretsen?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I'll wait until ministerial statements.

REDEEMER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ACT, 2004

Mr McMeekin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr6, An Act respecting Redeemer University College.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Pursuant to standing order 84, this bill stands referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing

order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Tuesday, June 8, 2004, and Wednesday, June 9, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoy, Pat	Parsons, Ernie
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Peters, Steve
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kennedy, Gerard	Phillips, Gerry
Bountrogianni, Marie	Klees, Frank	Pupatello, Sandra
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kwinter, Monte	Racco, Mario G.
Caplan, David	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Leal, Jeff	Runciman, Robert W.
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Delaney, Bob	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Di Cocco, Caroline	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Dombrowsky, Leona	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Duncan, Dwight	Miller, Norm	Wong, Tony C.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fonseca, Peter	Mitchell, Carol	Yakabuski, John
Gerretsen, John	O'Toole, John	
Gravelle, Michael	Orazietti, David	

The Speaker: All those against, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Kormos, Peter	Wilson, Jim
Bisson, Gilles	Marchese, Rosario	
Chudleigh, Ted	Martel, Shelley	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 55; the nays are 10.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak about an important initiative our government is undertaking to improve Ontario's competitive edge and to renew our post-secondary system.

Our Premier is committed to our province's increased prosperity, and he has great expectations for what Ontario's colleges and universities will contribute to that prosperity agenda. Not only does he want to increase the number of students in colleges and universities; he wants Ontarians to strive for higher levels of education. Our Premier is convinced that this must happen if we are to build a stronger economy and a better quality of life for the people of Ontario.

We have already taken an important step by freezing tuition fees for two years and providing fair compensation to colleges and universities to fund the tuition freeze while a review of post-secondary education is conducted. This funding will enable Ontario's students to continue to have access to the quality of post-secondary education that our province requires if we are to remain competitive. We did this despite the fiscal challenges we face.

Last month's budget announced that former Premier Bob Rae will conduct a comprehensive review to examine the design—

Applause.

Hon Mrs Chambers: I'll just say that again, Mr Speaker.

Last month's budget announced that former Premier Bob Rae will conduct a comprehensive review to examine the design and funding of Ontario's post-secondary education system to ensure that we have a high-quality, accessible and affordable system for today's students and for future generations. We are pleased that he has agreed to head this very important work as adviser to the Premier and to me, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. I would like you to acknowledge again the Honourable Bob Rae in our gallery today.

Applause.

Hon Mrs Chambers: I would also like to announce the seven members of the advisory panel who will support Mr. Rae:

Leslie Church is a law student at the University of Toronto and former executive director of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

Ian Davidson is chief of police for Greater Sudbury and is active in community service, participating in a wide range of First Nations, multicultural, youth and seniors' initiatives.

The Honourable William Davis is a former Premier and education minister who presided over the reshaping of Ontario's education system, creating new universities and our college system.

Don Drummond is senior vice-president and chief economist for TD Bank Financial Group and recently co-authored a special report on post-secondary education in Canada.

Dr Inez Elliston is an educator and community worker who has been involved in teaching, professional development and training in schools and at the university level for more than 30 years.

Richard Johnston is president of Centennial College and retires this month. As past chair of the Ontario Council of Regents, he implemented a range of reforms and helped establish two French colleges.

Huguette Labelle is chancellor of the University of Ottawa and has served on the advisory council of the

Canadian Bureau for International Education and the boards of post-secondary institutions.

We are grateful that Mr Rae and the distinguished members of the advisory panel have agreed to serve the province of Ontario by contributing their extensive experience and expertise to this review.

I have asked Mr Rae to make recommendations to deliver a more coordinated, collaborative and differentiated system, and to develop a sustainable funding framework, including operating grants, tuition and student assistance in support of the newly designed system. These suggestions would allow students to move easily between institutions, promote greater enhancement of institutions' unique strengths, provide opportunities to invest in particular areas of specialization and make Ontario's post-secondary system more internationally competitive.

Mr Rae will develop recommendations through consultation with colleges and universities, students and their parents, faculty, staff and members of the private and public sectors. He will also ask leaders, innovators and experts drawn from Ontario and beyond for advice on issues such as system design; opportunities for specialization, differentiation and collaboration; funding; student assistance; and accountability. Mr Rae will look not only at what we have done in Ontario but also at jurisdictions from around the world where leading-edge colleges and universities exist, so that we can put Ontario at the forefront of innovation.

We will move quickly. Consultations will take place over the summer and fall. Mr Rae will provide his report to the Premier and myself in January 2005. Our government thanks Mr Rae and the members of the advisory panel for committing their time, energy and expertise to the review of Ontario's colleges and universities.

MUNICIPALITIES

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): Today, I have the privilege of introducing a bill that would, if passed, entrench for the future a new relationship between the provincial government and Ontario's municipalities. The bill I'm introducing is an amendment to Ontario's Municipal Act, 2001, that would recognize in legislation the memorandum of understanding between the provincial government and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

Before I go any further, I would like to recognize Mayor Ann Mulvale, president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, who has joined us in the gallery today. She is joined by Mayor Jacques Hétu, chair of the Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario, along with Pat Vanini, executive director of AMO, and Brian Rosborough, a senior policy adviser with AMO.

This bill represents a new way of dealing with Ontario's municipalities, a new approach to the relationship between the province and municipalities. It demonstrates our government's conviction that municipalities are, and should be treated as, accountable governments. Far too often in years past, municipalities have been caught off guard and taken by surprise by the provincial government of the day. After they've worked hard to draft their annual budgets, the province has often come along and imposed new standards, programs and other municipal requirements that leave them scrambling to meet these new financial and regulatory requirements.

This government does not believe this is a proper, respectful way to treat another order of government. Right now, there is a memorandum of understanding between the provincial government and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario that expires on December 31, 2004. It sets out the framework by which the province consults Ontario's municipal leaders on matters that affect their municipalities and their residents. However, this memorandum of understanding is not recognized in Ontario's Municipal Act, 2001.

Municipalities have been saying for some time that the people of Ontario are best served when the different orders of government work together, and we wholeheartedly agree. They have asked the government to recognize the memorandum of understanding in legislation as a way to reinforce that co-operative spirit. This is something we are pleased and proud to do.

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The bill we have introduced today would, if passed, recognize the memorandum of understanding which sets out the province's commitment to prior consultation with municipalities on matters of mutual interest that affect all of our residents. If passed, it will be a cornerstone of a new and stronger relationship between the province and municipalities.

The memorandum of understanding provides for regular meetings, which give provincial cabinet ministers and municipal representatives an important opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest to both orders of government. It allows the province to get feedback from municipal leaders before putting in place new laws and regulations that affect the ability of municipalities to meet their communities's needs.

That is the right way to treat another order of government. Clearly, the people of Ontario are better served when all governments work together for good policy development and, most of all, good service delivery to the people.

The government knows we have to rebuild a trusting, progressive relationship where municipalities are heard and listened to. This government is committed to working with municipalities, not against them, to build stronger, more self-reliant communities that offer Ontarians a higher quality of life.

In fact, we have made building stronger communities a key goal of our first year in office. Strong communities, large and small, urban and rural, are the essential ingredient for the high quality of life we all want for ourselves and our children. Ontarians depend on munici-

palities to play a key role in building those strong, safe and livable communities.

If passed, the bill would enshrine the memorandum of understanding in the Municipal Act, 2001. It will give municipalities a voice in provincial plans so that, collectively, we can provide the best services possible to all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to respond on behalf of the official opposition to the comments made by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

To begin with, I think it is important that we take this opportunity to review the post-secondary education system. Former Premier Rae will lead a team of seven very credible individuals. All have a keen interest in Ontario and in education. In particular, I would like to thank former Premier William Davis for participating on this committee. As we all know, under the Davis years as Minister of Education and later as Premier, the community college system that we rely on today was established.

The timing of the announcement today, though, is quite fascinating. Obviously the McGuinty Liberals needed something warm and cozy to announce, following an Ontario budget that has all but eliminated Paul Martin's chance of being re-elected and following a poll that now puts the McGuinty Liberals seven points behind the Progressive Conservative Party only eight months after the 2003 election. Clearly Mr McGuinty needs something very positive to announce. As well, it is interesting to note that this announcement is made on the same day as Elizabeth Witmer's opposition motion on health care campaign promises.

Let's see what Canada's NewsWire printed in response to the budget of May 18 as it relates to community colleges:

"Funding announced in today's provincial budget will not meet the critical operational shortfall facing Ontario's colleges of applied arts and technology.

"The colleges are facing an $80-million shortfall in operating funds for 2004-05.

"'The lower-than-needed funding provided in today's budget will mean cuts to programs, student services and layoffs,' says Richard Johnston, chair of the funding advisory committee of the committee of presidents of the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario.

"'We are disappointed that the government has deferred significant operating increases to the colleges,' says Johnston....

"'At best, we see today's commitment only as an initial recognition of our immediate needs, with a hope that the remainder will be provided in the coming months. Realistically, though, this will hurt ... it will hurt our students, it will hurt employers who need our graduates and, ultimately, this will hurt the communities we serve,' says Johnston."

We await the report from former Premier Rae, and we await the implementation of its recommendations.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In response to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I too want to welcome Ann Mulvale to this place. She has certainly done a great deal to advance the cause of municipalities. In fact, the minister may not be aware that Ann Mulvale signed the original agreement, December 19, when our government implemented this memorandum.

The fact of the matter is, Ms Mulvale, I want to caution you that putting things into law by this government really doesn't mean they're going to hold to their end of the bargain. This is the same government that voted for the Taxpayer Protection Act and now breaks it without even flinching. The fact of the matter is, that law would have called for a referendum before you pass tax increases into law.

Ms Mulvale, I trust this government will at least uphold this part of the law when they pass this into legislation. Don't hold your breath on that either, because the credibility of this government to do anything, prescribed by law or not, is at an all-time low. According to the latest polls, 9% of people in this province believe what this Premier says. That is at an all-time low. The credibility of this government is zero in this province.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I would like to add a few comments on the statement made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in the minute I have left. I would say that the actions of this government demonstrate their new approach to dealing with municipal government. We need to look at the actions of the May 18 budget, when this government unilaterally removed the six municipalities of Muskoka from northern Ontario.

I would like to ask, how much consultation did you do with the six municipalities in Muskoka? Who did you talk to? Who did you ask? To whom did you justify your reasons for removing Muskoka from the north? If ever there were six municipalities caught off guard, it was those six municipalities. I would say that demonstrates the true spirit of this government.

Regardless of what we're seeing in this new legislation today, the actions speak for themselves. It's about time this government started consulting instead of just unilaterally passing very significant changes that will very dramatically affect municipalities.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I want to say there is no doubt that Mr Rae is eminently suitable for the job. I can vouch for the fact that, as a former leader of our party, he is a man of integrity, experience, knowledge and with a strong commitment to the post-secondary education system.

There is also no doubt about the fact that the new economy demands that knowledge—not "demands," but we know knowledge is key to the wealth of nations. We know that in the past our post-secondary education system has served us well, except in the last eight or so years when we've had chronic underfunding, and it has shaken—they have shaken—the foundation of our post-secondary education system.

What do we know about funding? Ontario universities have the second-lowest funding in Canada: $5,948, compared to the national average of $8,044. What do we know about the college system? The college system serves 49% more students than it did 15 years ago, but gets 44% less in operating funding in constant dollars. Ontario colleges receive $4,700 per student for operating support, in contrast to a national average of $6,800.

We have a funding problem. We don't need a study to necessarily tell us that we have a funding crisis. What I say to this government is this: What we need you to do today is deliver the money so our universities are able to do an effective job in order to meet the demands of a knowledge economy. But we've waited so long under the Conservative government that we can wait yet another two months until Mr Rae delivers a report that will address this particular issue. I can wait. I've waited very long.

The fact that our universities and colleges have not received the funding they deserve has increased tuition fees more than 60% in the last eight years. Deregulated tuition fees have seen more dramatic increases, up to 700% in some colleges and universities. It's more costly to go to university in Ontario than in any other province except Nova Scotia.

1420

When universities and colleges do not get the support they need, the burden shifts to students. If you are a child or a student of a wealthy family, you're OK; you've got no problem. But if you are a daughter or son of someone who earns $20,000, $30,000, $40,000, $50,000, even $60,000, you've got a problem.

We've got to stop shifting the burden to students. Tuition fee levels are unacceptable. We demand from the Liberal government that tuition fees go down and not up. Mercifully, they've frozen them for two years. We demand they go down.

As to the matter of the review, which speaks to having a more coordinated, collaborative educational system, we've got no problem with that, but we do have concerns about the differentiated system. I don't know what Mr Rae is going to do about what you think about this specialized system, but I've got concerns. I don't want to have to travel thousand of miles to get to the program I need. So we look forward to the report. I don't know what he has to say about that, but I'm expressing my concerns right now.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): On the whole issue of dealing with municipalities, we welcome here Ann Mulvale and the entire team. But I'll tell you that the real person that you should have on that team is Jerry Maguire, because he wants to know, "Where is the money? Show me the money." If you can find him, put him on the team as well.

I tell you that this government has not been kind to municipalities. This government is not giving as much money to the city of Toronto for transit as the former government gave to the city of Toronto for transit. You are giving less money. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs is one of those 15 targeted ministries that is going to get a cut. It's going to get a cut that over the next couple of years is going to amount to some 12% of their budget.

Last but not least, you have not been kind to municipalities or voters. I point out the city of Kawartha Lakes, which held a referendum where the people voted. You denied the referendum; you denied their democratic rights. You have denied the rights to them and, I would put it, to every other municipality that is seeking the same redress against the former government.

I will point only to the province of Quebec on June 20, which is going to do the right thing. Please watch that referendum. Please have the guts to do the same thing they're willing to do, because the people have spoken and the people need to be heard.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): To the Deputy Premier—or the real Deputy Premier, I guess I should say. Mr Deputy Premier—

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Acting Premier.

Mr Eves: I can't help but chuckle at the fact that the Minister of Finance wants it on the record that the government House leader is not the Deputy Premier. I can only infer from that that he wishes he was. He gets very upset when I refer to the government House leader. However, be that as it may, I'll leave the internal politics for that side of the House.

My question is very simple: Ninety-one per cent of the people in the province of Ontario believe that you have a credibility problem over there. I think that you can seriously address it. If you're still talking to the Prime Minister's office over there, you can probably help him in the process by simply living up to your commitment to have a referendum so the people of Ontario can give you their opinion as to whether they think your new health tax is the best way of addressing the future of health care in the province of Ontario.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, has more integrity than any premier I've ever known. I will stand behind that integrity as long as I can. My friend opposite forgets that on June 27, Mr Baird, Mr

Arnott, Mr Chudleigh, Mr Dunlop, Mr Hardeman, Mr Eves, Mr Hudak, Mr Jackson, Mr Klees and Mr Miller—what did they do on June 27, 2002? They voted to break the Taxpayer Protection Act. That's what they did. They voted on a budget bill that had no public hearings and no third reading debate.

I need no lecture from the member opposite about integrity in government. I look at their financial statement that was put out in August, and what did it say? That statement said there would be a balanced budget. Two months later we found out that wasn't the case. Premier McGuinty is a man of integrity, is delivering better—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is also for the Acting Premier. The Premier stated on a segment of Focus Ontario in April that he would not be raising taxes, this after he promised in the election campaign that he would go to a referendum before raising taxes. Now he's raised taxes to the tune of, and in the effective amount of, $9 billion for the people of Ontario. Only 9% of Ontarians believe the Premier can be trusted at this point. Will you not attempt to restore some faith in the people of Ontario by holding a referendum on these taxes?

Hon Mr Duncan: The Premier, the Minister of Finance and this government are delivering a budget that will improve our health care and our education. That is the priority of this government. Our priority is about kids, about the schools and the education that that member's government cut. It is about improved health care service, more cataract surgery, more heart surgery.

This budget is not about tax cuts; it is about improved health and education. Premier McGuinty and this government are delivering the improvements we need, and we're confident that the people of Ontario, when they see the results of this transformation, will see a better health care system that serves the people, a better education system that serves our people. And they will understand that these choices were made in the context of a government that ignored health care and education far, far too long.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): A final supplementary to the Acting Premier: I encourage him to think about the response of Ontarians that is reflected in the current polls, where you have dropped like a rock. Part of the reason for that is not just your broken promises but the responses, or lack of responses, the opposition parties are getting from you in the Legislature. We're getting an indication of that here today: non-answers, political rhetoric.

Let's set aside the deficit question, whether there was a deficit that you suggest there was—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr Runciman: Two of the 231 promises the Liberals made in their platform were (1) they would not run a deficit, and (2) if they did increase taxes, they would have a referendum. There are two separate issues here. The Liberals continue to try to ride on the deficit issue. But regardless of the deficit issue, they made a solemn promise to the people of Ontario that they would not increase their taxes without having a referendum. How do you jibe with that, Mr Acting Premier? What's your response to that? Give Ontarians a straight answer for a change.

Hon Mr Duncan: It's clear that my colleague opposite wants the people of Ontario to forget that government's eight years in power. But do you know what? We can't forget. We can't forget the people who haven't been able to access proper health care. We can't forget the fact that too many of our children are not achieving the provincial standard in education. We cannot forget the need to deal with affordable housing.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm going to ask the leader of the official opposition if he could allow the Acting Premier to respond.

Hon Mr Duncan: We won't forget those people on ODSP who didn't have an increase in 11 years. We won't forget the people on welfare who didn't have an increase in nine years. No, we won't forget. And the people of Ontario won't forget the $5.6-billion deficit you left this province. They won't forget the mess you left in the electricity sector. They won't forget the mess you left in the health care sector.

This government is taking tough decisions in a responsible fashion—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

1430

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Deputy Premier. As you know, there will be a rally on the front steps of the Legislature tomorrow at noon. It's to be held by very good friends of yours. The Taxpayer Protection Act is going to be challenged by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Those are people with whom you, during the course of your election campaign, made a great show of signing a pledge, and that pledge was to support and uphold the Taxpayer Protection Act of this province.

Given your alignment with this organization during the election campaign, will you align with them tomorrow on the steps of this place in support of the Taxpayer Protection Act? Will you do that? Will you be there tomorrow?

Hon Mr Duncan: On June 27, 2002, that member, Mr Klees, voted to break the Taxpayer Protection Act. That's in the record. That was his government's act. We're making common cause with all the people of Ontario to improve our health care and improve our education system. No doubt there are people who will not support all of our decisions, but I am confident that, unlike the previous government, the people of Ontario will see the wisdom in the choices we've made—the wisdom in improving our health care system, the wisdom in improving our education system. They'll see through this

argument by a member who, on June 27, 2002, voted in favour of breaking the Taxpayer Protection Act himself. We need no lecture from you on keeping commitments. That's one that you broke in this House that day.

Mr Klees: I'm very pleased to respond to that. The fact of the matter is that this member continues equivocation. People are watching this member and people are watching how this government plays with the truth. He knows full well that what we did when we were in government was to defer a tax break. That's what we did; we deferred a tax break. We also brought that back in. So it is not at all the same thing, and the people in this province know that.

He knows what he is doing by deflecting the reality, that he and his government are in fact breaking the law. I challenge him to face the very people with whom he aligned arm in arm during the election campaign. Will he have the guts to show up tomorrow on the steps of the Legislature?

Hon Mr Duncan: I'll remind the member opposite that he had signed the taxpayer pledge before he voted on June 27, 2002, to break that particular act. I'll tell you what takes guts. Taking guts means taking tough decisions. It means fixing the health care system that your party left in a mess. It means facing up to the $5.6-billion deficit that you left. It means acknowledging that this financial statement was hooey, was garbage. It said in September 2003 that there would be a balanced budget, and what did the auditor say? He said no such thing—a $5.6-billion deficit. This government's taking the tough choices to ensure that our priorities and the priorities of the people of Ontario—better health care, better education—are properly looked after and properly funded, something you failed to do in eight long, painful years.

Mr Klees: The real tough job for this government is going to be to tell the truth one day. That is the real challenge for this government.

Along those lines, yesterday in question period I put to the Premier that he said one thing and the Prime Minister said another, that he, as Premier, had said he had disclosed to the Prime Minister that there would be a health care premium. It was reported by the Canadian Press yesterday. The Prime Minister denied it. The Premier undertook to correct that record yesterday. We have checked CP today, we've checked BN: no correction. I'd like to know from the Deputy Premier, will he make the tough decision today and have his Premier admit that either he or the Prime Minister was not telling the truth? Will he do that?

Hon Mr Duncan: One thing we won't do is cook the books the way that government did in its last budget. Another thing we won't do is have a budget at Magna. Another thing we won't do is close 39 hospitals. Another thing we won't do is take money out of classrooms and give it to corporations in the form of tax cuts. Another thing we won't do is try to pretend that our record didn't exist.

This government has now, and will take into the next election, a record that it can be proud of. It will be a record of improved health care; it will be a record of improved education, something you'll never be able to say. I believe strongly—and you'll see—that the people of Ontario will see the wisdom of this budget and will understand that the actions we've taken will ensure better health care and better education for everybody.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Finance. I heard on the radio this morning that the Premier is promising that every penny of your regressive and unfair health tax on working families will go to health care. Then I looked at Bill 83, your budget bill, to find the legal provision that would make that so, and what a surprise. There's nothing in your budget bill that requires that the money raised be spent on health care. What a shock: the Premier out there promising something again, promising that all the money will go to health care, but when we look for the provisions that will make that the law, they're not there. Minister of Finance, how do you explain the Premier making more promises, but when you look for the law, when you look for the provisions that will make it so, once again they don't exist? How do you explain that?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I simply invite my dear friend from Kenora-Rainy River to look at pages 43 and 44 of the budget papers. On these pages he will see that in this year alone we are going to be spending an additional $2.3 billion in health care, $406 million in long-term care. That's going to affect your mom and my mom and his mom and his mom and her mom, who are in long-term-care facilities. We are going to be spending an additional $470 million to improve the quality of care in our hospitals. This year the Ontario health premium will raise an additional $1.6 billion. This year we'll be spending an additional $2.3 billion to make the kind of health care system in Ontario that we can be truly proud of. I think the fact that we have made that commitment in this budget and right the way through a four-year plan should give the member for Kenora-Rainy River some comfort.

Mr Hampton: My question is about what will be in the law, not about more of your rhetoric. This is rhetoric. This is what will become law, and there is not one word that says the money you're taking out of the pockets of hard-working modest- and middle-income families is going to go to health care. There is nothing that requires it go to health care. And do you know what that means? Speaker, you know what it means. Absent that provision, your government can spend it on advertising if you want. You can spend it on anything. You don't have to spend it on health care.

So tell me: The Premier is out there promising it's all going to health care, but there's nothing in your budget bill, which is going to become the budget law, that requires that. Is this just Dalton McGuinty making more empty promises, since it isn't in the law?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Honest to God, I would have expected more from the leader of the third party. You

know, he's read the budget. He's an intelligent man. He understands budgeting. He understands long-term plans. Certainly someone in his office has looked at the four-year spending plan of the Ministry of Health and the government of Ontario in health care and has seen in the budget we presented that every single year over the next four years, every single cent from the Ontario health premium will go into improving health care services. Every single cent, I repeat, will go into improvements in health care in this province.

1440

Mr Hampton: Do you know what I think the Minister of Finance and the Liberal government are saying? They're admitting it's not in the law. What they're saying to people is, "Trust us." Liberals, who've broken just about every election promise they've made, are saying to the people again, "Trust us."

Minister of Finance, when governments really care about something, they create a dedicated fund. That's why we have a forest renewal trust fund in the province. The money that comes from stumpage fees can only be spent to renew the forest. I don't see a dedicated fund. I don't see the provisions for establishing a dedicated fund. I don't see that at all. My question to you is, given that Dalton McGuinty has become the consummate promise breaker, why should the people believe this promise when you've broken all the others?

Hon Mr Sorbara: His story line, to people watching who don't know how this place works, maybe has some sort of resonance. He knows full well that estimates are presented in this Legislature, that those estimates and votes govern where money is spent, and that this Legislature—all 103 members—have the responsibility to hold the government to account on its budget.

We've done more than that. We have set out a four-year plan to ensure that every single cent of the Ontario health care premium will go into improved primary care, into reducing the waiting times for cataract surgery, into better community level care, better home care, better long-term care. He knows that. For him to propose anything else in question period is simply a distortion and is unacceptable.

Mr Hampton: I am—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): This is a new question.

Mr Hampton: My question is to the Minister of Finance. I am here to hold a government of promise breakers to account. I went to your budget document, looking for any provision that would require that money, the $2 billion you are taking out of the pockets of hard-working families, to go into health care. Do you know what I found? All I found is section 17, dealing with the Taxpayer Protection Act, which says that the Taxpayer Protection Act "is amended by adding the following subsection:

"(7) Despite subsection (1), the following provisions may be"—may be—"included in a bill that receives first reading in 2004:

"1. A provision that amends the Income Tax Act to establish a new tax...."

It doesn't say all the money has to be spent on health care.

Only 9% of the people in the province believe the Premier any more. Given that he has broken all the other promises, given that there is no provision in your budget bill, why should anybody in Ontario believe that this money—

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister of Finance.

Hon Mr Sorbara: My goodness, he has been around here too long to ask questions like this. I will simply refer my friend again to the estimates this year. I will refer my friend to page 43 and page 44 of paper A of the budget papers presented on April 18. There we have expenditures of some $2.36 billion set out in detail. If he goes to the revenue side of the budget papers for this year, he will see that the Ontario health premium will raise $1.6 billion. I will tell him in addition that in the estimates that will be presented in this House shortly, all of those expenditures will be detailed in votes that will ensure the expenditures are made exactly in the areas provided for in the estimates and in the budget and in the votes this House takes.

Mr Hampton: The Minister of Finance is trying to confuse people. This is just a budget speech along with your rhetoric. This is what will become the law. There is nothing in Bill 83, the budget bill, that requires that the $2 billion you're are taking out of the pockets of hard-working families is going to be spent on health care. Dalton McGuinty is out there running radio ads: "I'm Dalton McGuinty, and I want you to know that every penny of the health premium will go to health care." But it's not in the law. Given that the Premier has broken every promise already, why should people believe him? Why isn't it in the law if all of this money is supposed to go to health care?

Hon Mr Sorbara: This guy would not get a job in a C movie in Hollywood. Honest to God, Howard, this is unacceptable. Howard Hampton, the member for Kenora-Rainy River, knows full well that the bill dealing with the Ontario health premium has not even been introduced in this Legislature yet. In fact, it will not be introduced till after the bill he is referring to is passed by this Legislature. So for him to suggest there's nothing in the legislation currently before the House dealing with the Ontario health premium is obvious and apparent. He knows that bill has not even been introduced yet, and for him to suggest otherwise is just foolish and unacceptable.

Mr Hampton: I want you to know I feel terribly wounded. The government that only 9% of the people in the province believe wants to insult me because they don't want to answer the question.

Look, here is what it says in your budget provision. It says that a provision that amends the Income Tax Act to establish a new tax may be introduced.

Do you want the people of Ontario to believe you after all your broken promises? Introduce that bill today. Introduce that bill that says that all this money that's being

taken out of the pockets of hard-working families is going to health care. Do it today; otherwise, nobody will believe you. Do it now, Minister.

Hon Mr Sorbara: When he is asked the question outside this Legislature, he or his House leader will have to admit that it is impossible to introduce a bill in this Legislature to deal with the Ontario health premium until the bill that we are currently debating is passed. He knows that. Every member of this Legislature knows that. The only person in the House who doesn't know that is Howard Hampton.

I simply refer my dear friend to pages 43 and 44 of the budget papers. He will see there that some $406 million, increased, in long-term-care facilities is going to be spent in this year. Every single expenditure is itemized on these two pages. If he would have the courtesy to look at those pages, perhaps his questions could be taken somewhat more seriously.

Mr Hampton: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I ask for unanimous consent for the government to introduce their legislation which says it will all be spent on health care.

The Speaker: I ask, and I heard a no.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Deputy Premier. There are 91% of all Ontarians who disagree with your health care decisions, and as you know, every day you and all of us in this House are being inundated with thousands of e-mails, phone calls and letters regarding your decision to delist physiotherapy, chiropractic and eye exams.

I have a letter from Cindy Beatty. She has suffered from migraines most of her life. She suffered from whiplash as a result of a car accident, and she now visits the chiropractor and is finally getting some relief. However, she is struggling to pay the portion of the cost not covered by OHIP. She says that if delisting occurs, she will not be able to afford chiropractic care and will experience increased pain, time off work and greater disability.

Deputy Premier, could you please tell Ms Beatty how she now will be able to receive the care that she needs to lead a relatively normal life?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I refer that to the Minister of Health.

1450

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As I've had the opportunity to several times in the days since the House resumed, I'm pleased to respond to the honourable member. The honourable member makes the assertion that there's some number out there who have reported on their state of acceptance of our health care priorities, but what the honourable member didn't speak to, as an example, was the Meningitis Society of Canada, which said that in one fell swoop, as a result of the initiative our government has taken, we have done more to help children than the introduction of the car seat.

I didn't hear in the honourable member's question a recognition that this budget brings $191 million to upgrade substantially the quality of care that our seniors are receiving in long-term-care facilities, a sorry legacy of your time in government.

I didn't hear from the honourable member the percentage of Ontarians who very much support the idea that, as a result of our family health team initiatives, we will begin to reduce the number of communities in our province that are underserviced from the standpoint of physicians, a number of communities that, under their watch, almost tripled. Where are the comments about those people in the member's questioning?

Mrs Witmer: This Minister of Health was unable to answer the question I put to him. He's the individual. His government promised to increase accessibility to health care. They have now delisted services. My question is pretty simple.

We have a letter here from Cindy Beatty. It is among thousands of letters, e-mails and phone calls that we are getting. In fact, 91% of Ontarians disagree with your decisions on health care. I want you to tell her how she can continue to receive the chiropractic care she needs in order that she will have less pain, less time off work and less disability and be able to lead a relatively normal life. I don't want rhetoric, nor does she. Show your compassion and answer the question.

Hon Mr Smitherman: First, in the honourable member's earlier question she referenced a car accident, and we all know that if that is what caused the injury to the individual, then auto insurance coverage will be of assistance.

I also didn't get any recognition from the honourable member that in her role as Minister of Health on February 12—my birthday—1999, she substantially reduced the amount of provincial assistance to people receiving chiropractic. She doesn't reference that, nor anywhere in her questioning does she stand in her place and acknowledge that in a wide variety of other areas our government has moved forward with changes in the Ontario health care system that will lead to a transformation that makes it sustainable for future generations and frankly addresses so many of the problems related to quality that are the tired and sorry legacy of that party when they were in government in this province.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Your cuts to essential health care services promote two-tier health care here in Ontario.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I would ask the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound to come to order.

Ms Martel: Minister, your cuts to essential health care services promote two-tier health care in Ontario. That means if you can afford to pay for health care you can buy quality care and if you can't, you do without.

Cheryl Letheren is an optometrist who trained and practised in the United States and now practises in London. She knows what private two-tier health care does to patients. She said, "I saw people coming in with really atrocious things because they didn't have the money and they waited until it was really bad."

Minister, why are you promoting two-tier health care here in Ontario?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I think the Minister of Health wants to comment on this question.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm pleased to say to the honourable member in response to her question that our government's plan with respect to health care is an investment of $2.2 billion, which significantly alters the way care is delivered in this province through a transformation agenda which drives resources to the community level. You see this in our reforms to primary health care, where over the period of the next four years an additional $600 million will help develop family health teams.

The reality of the situation is that our plans with respect to optometry that the honourable member mentions are to reprofile that program in a fashion which frankly makes it more consistent with the way programs are delivered across the country, which reaches out to protect low-income individuals and those with established medical conditions in every other province and makes certain that the youngest and those who are oldest in our province, who have the highest and most obvious need for these services, will continue to gain advantage of them.

One more point on this: The honourable member is now a great supporter of optometry, but why is it the sorry record of those two parties that over a period of 12 or 14 years, while they were the government, there was no increase in the amount of services—

The Speaker: Order. Supplementary.

Ms Martel: Last time I checked, it was you and your Liberal government that are cutting access to optometry services—cutting. You see, during the election you and your friends said you wouldn't cut health care services, and here we are, after the election, and this Liberal government is delisting essential services like eye exams, physiotherapy and chiropractic care.

Minister, these are not luxury health care services. The five leading causes of blindness in Canada, for example, have no pain signals at all to warn of serious eye problems. That's why we need annual eye exams in Ontario to detect those problems, and we need those exams to be paid by OHIP. There's no need for Ontario to race to the bottom and follow other provinces that might be there.

You said you wouldn't cut health care services. After the election, here you are doing just that. Two-tier health care is bad health care. Will you reverse your decision and continue to pay for these essential health care services?

Hon Mr Smitherman: Only the honourable member could take $2.2 billion in additional funding and call that a cut. Where does the honourable member speak? Where is the recognition—the same as the honourable member for Kitchener-Waterloo likes to pretend that our government's budget is not one which makes significant new investment in quality health care services that are essential to the quality of life for people in Ontario. One hundred million dollars in additional funding for home care stands out as one example where we hear no comment back from the honourable member.

This was a difficult decision, but it is a decision that was made to make possible the provision of health care services in this province that are more essential to the day-to-day quality of life for the people of Ontario. At the end of the day, it's about priority.

I close with this point to both of those parties: They make a lot of noise about optometry now, but it is the sorry but true record of both of those parties that while they were in government they did not bring forward any increases to the amount provided. Our government was left with a choice, an enormous unfunded liability in the form of enormous cost pressure—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

CHILD CARE

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister for Children and Youth Services. As you well know, there is a premium on the number of daycare spaces in this province. At this time of year, the need for additional daycare spaces becomes even more urgent in rural communities such as mine, as farm families try to get their crops into the ground. But we continue to hear from children's advocates and child care advocates that they are increasingly worried about the closing of daycare spaces. They have appealed to the provincial government to spend federal child care dollars on child care. Minister, can you reassure those advocates and the parents in my riding that this will indeed happen?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Indeed, in the last few months, going across the province, I did hear those concerns and fears. Child care has been neglected for almost a decade. We will spend, as we announced in our budget, every penny of the $58 million from the multilateral framework on child care and early learning. We understand the importance of the peace of mind parents need, when they drop their kids off somewhere to be taken care of, that good, regulated child care spaces are necessary.

With respect to rural areas, there are special challenges out there, and we are developing our best start plan to address some of those needs as well, I can assure my colleague.

1500

Mrs Van Bommel: I have been hearing that the federal Conservatives under Stephen Harper do not believe in boosting spending on institutional daycare. In fact, he has stated he will provide funding to families with no concern for how those dollars will be spent. We know

what happens when governments do not spend money on quality, accessible daycare.

The evidence is in the eight years that Ontarians have watched as the foundation of our own provincial child care system has crumbled.

There are now huge waiting lists for subsidized day-care spaces, daycare spots have closed and families are worried that their children will not have access to the quality care they deserve because they, as parents, cannot afford to send their children to these spaces.

Minister, the debate on daycare has gone on for far too long. We know that quality, accessible child care and early learning programs are the best way to ensure that our children and grandchildren have the very best start in life. Why would Mr Harper ignore the evidence and refuse to acknowledge that funding child care and early learning is critical to our children's future?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I couldn't have said it better myself. That was excellent. Indeed, the debate is over. The research is clear. Good, quality early childhood education, child care and early learning are important. The Eves-Harris Tories ignored that, even though Dr Fraser Mustard told them and criticized them about how they were spending their money.

Mr Harper's Conservatives seem as ideologically bent as the Harris-Eves Conservatives. They want to reduce the opportunities for children to receive the child care they need and deserve. In contrast to the federal Conservatives, Mr Martin's Liberals get it. They know that child care is important and I applaud their new child care initiative, and I look forward to working with the municipalities in spending the monies.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): My question is to my good friend the Minister of Finance. Yesterday, Premier McGuinty, in his response to a question raised by Elizabeth Witmer on whether it's a health tax or a health premium, left everyone wondering. I ask you today: Is it a health tax or a health premium?

I believe John Weatherup had it right when he said, "I don't think the government knew what it was doing." Would you stand in your place and simply do the right thing and cancel your broken-promise, mean-spirited health tax or health premium today in the House?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): The Ontario health premium, along with the other measures that we put in the budget, will bring us back to financial health in this province over the course of four years. It is a very important mechanism. You have to understand that the situation we were confronted with in preparing the budget was what's called a structural or embedded deficit.

Had we not taken steps to raise additional revenues, we were really confronted with two choices: Allow an historic deterioration of public services, like closing major hospitals and removing funding from major sectors of government, or doing the right thing and ensuring that this province could have both a sound balance sheet, so that we're not borrowing more money to finance our services, and a very high quality of public services. I want to tell my friend that the Ontario health premium is a major component of that plan to put us back into sound financial health

Mr O'Toole: The minister clarifies one thing: that it is a tax on health care. Whether it's called a premium or a tax, you know it's going to cost tens of millions of dollars to every teacher, every educational worker, every CUPE worker, every OPSEU worker. Every public sector employee is going to demand that you pay the premium. It's going to mean that small business and all the other taxpayers of Ontario are going to be paying for your mistakes.

Minister, I'm asking you if you have actually thought this through, or do I have to look at other quotes where people say they actually think the government has lost its marbles? I honestly don't think that you get it. In your budget you mistakenly called it a premium to avoid the word that it was a tax increase. Are you going to raise this tax, or are you going to take the money out of the classrooms and the hospitals of this province? Tell the people today where you are going to get the money to pay for this increased tax or premium.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I am not going to seek unanimous consent to allow the member to rephrase that question even though, frankly, I'm still worrying about what the content of it is.

Let me be very clear about it: The Ontario health premium is a levy that will be collected through the income tax system. It is the first of its sort that is geared to income so that those on more modest incomes, those earning $20,000 or less, will pay absolutely nothing at all, and those at the highest income levels will pay the highest level of the premium.

But I want to tell my friend that it should be clear to everyone that failure to pay the premium is a violation of the Income Tax Act; it does not disqualify anyone from services in health care in this province. Much more important than that, it gives us the resources, as my friend the Minister of Health said just a few moments ago, to build a health care system that is sustainable for generations to come. That's the magic of this budget and the premium.

HOSPITALS

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Acting Premier. On May 28, 2003, your Premier told the Ottawa Citizen that he "believes that public-private sector partnerships in health care would ultimately cost the province more money than traditional arrangements," and he is exactly right. On May 17, 2004, an internal document from the board meeting at the William Osler hospital revealed that the private sector consortium now wants an additional $22 million before it will sign a final deal. This is a project that has gone from $165 million to $325 million to $550 million, and now

the private sector wants $22 million more before it will sign on.

Your Premier promised to cancel P3 hospitals because they cost too much. Will you do the right thing, cancel this deal and build this important project with public financing?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I refer that to the Minister of Health.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I find it slightly passing strange that the honourable member, who is from Sudbury, would try to make it seem that hospital projects undertaken with private sector involvement are the only ones that undergo extraordinary increases in their projected costs. I think she would well know that in Sudbury, Thunder Bay and pretty much every other place that government undertook a new project, that's been the legacy.

To the question the member asked, I had a chance to read the same story. The issue of the negotiations between the consortium and William Osler Health Centre is their issue. The government has indicated a ceiling to the amount of support we're prepared to provide for this badly needed new hospital in Brampton, and that's an amount we're sticking with. My message to the honourable member, but more particularly to the consortium and the hospital board, is that it's time to get on with it to get this project built, because frankly speaking, the people of Brampton have waited too long for a good, quality health facility and we think it needs to get built sooner.

Ms Martel: I say to the minister, this is your issue and your problem. The board minute also says that the private sector consortium has channelled this appeal for an additional $22 million directly to the government. So now it's sitting on your desk to deal with. It is your issue and your problem because it is very clear that with private sector financing the taxpayers of the province and the people in Brampton will pay more. They will pay more because it costs the private sector consortium more to borrow the money for the project and because the private sector consortium wants a profit for their undertaking.

You should be building this hospital in the traditional fashion, with public financing through capital grants. You should not be forcing this hospital to try to pay for a mortgage through its operating grant when it already has a $27-million operating deficit and a cash deficit problem of $30 million. Minister, do the right thing. Your Premier was right: It does cost more for private hospitals. Cancel this deal and build this hospital in the public sector.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I would say to the honourable member that the right thing to do at this point is not, for the purposes of her own political wish and expediency, to be sending a message that because somebody asks—in this case, a private sector consortium—they should get. The point is, if you go back and read what I said in my first answer, we have clearly established as a government the amount of money we are prepared to provide to William Osler Health Centre to build a new hospital facility that is publicly controlled, publicly operated and accountable for the people of Brampton. That is the number we are prepared to provide.

For the purposes of the honourable member's argument, it seems she wants to accede to the wishes of the private sector, to offer more money to the consortium. Our point is different. It is that there is an amount that we have established and will provide in annual capital instalments to the William Osler Health Centre. These are the conditions that we have supported; they are the conditions that we continue to support. While the honourable member may wish to see a bigger payment to the private sector, we do not, and therefore I will not be proceeding on the basis that the honourable member recommends.

1510

HOME CARE

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): My question is for the Minister of Health. In my opinion, among some of the best news in the budget is our government's commitment to invest in Ontario's home care sector. We all know that home care is critical for our seniors, that it contributes to their ability to stay in their homes and age with independence and dignity.

In Don Valley West, most home care services are coordinated by the North York Community Care Access Centre and the East York Access Centre. I understand that CCACs will play a significant role in the government's plan to deliver the additional home care to 95,000 clients in the years to come. Minister, what will the home care funding announced in the budget mean to the community care access centres that serve my constituents in Don Valley West?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As a result of our government's commitment to home care, all members of the Legislature will be able to see the benefits that accrue to the folks in their ridings. I'd say, quite frankly, this is disproportionately seniors, as is appropriate, because we all share the view that the best place for people to live is in their homes, homes that they've come to know. So we support their independence.

As a result, there's $100 million in additional resources in this year's budget to support home care, $70 million of that targeted at post-acute care, but also significant investments, for the first time in a long time, of additional resources for mental health and the development of palliative end-of-life care.

The honourable member can expect that the residents of Don Valley West will continue to receive benefit, and will see enhanced benefit, as a result of our contribution of $100 million of new money.

Ms Wynne: Thank you, Mr Minister. It's good news that our CCACs are going to have increased capacity to deliver home care.

Last Friday, I held my first post-budget seniors' advisory council meeting. This council is made up of

seniors' reps, advocates for seniors and agencies that serve seniors in the community. In particular, members of my advisory council were concerned to ensure that part of the new home care funding will be directed to enhancing the budget for home care for the frail elderly, for those who are trying to age in place, in their homes. Such funding ensures that they can stay in their homes. It's not so much the acute care issue as people who are frail elderly.

Minister, will you assure my constituents that some of the new home care funding will be earmarked for care for the frail elderly who have not yet experienced acute issues, to help them stay in their homes?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I want to make it clear to the honourable member that in addition to the $100 million that I've been speaking about quite a lot, there are two additional allocations that are designed to offer enhanced assistance to those people who are suffering perhaps from chronic situations where it is more along the lines of homemaking services that are required. Set against a trend, which has been reduction of these services over the past number of years, we are working hard this year to make sure that we consolidate what we have and look for opportunities for expansion. Therefore, there will be $4.9 million in additional funding for long-term chronic care needs and about an additional $15 million for community support services. These are things associated with Meals on Wheels, Alzheimer day programs and the like.

I think it is the combination of these additional allocations of funding that will make a significant contribution, with much more work to do, to be sure, to the benefit of the members of the riding of Don Valley West and all ridings across Ontario.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is for the Minister of Finance. After promising Ontarians for years and years not to delist medical services, and the Liberal Party indicating that it would never bring in two-tier medicine, that's exactly what you did when you delisted chiropractic services, eye examinations and physiotherapy services. After promising very clearly not to privatize health care services, it's exactly what you are doing by delisting these services. You say that in the chiropractic services alone you're going to save $93 million, and that the reason you have to privatize these services and take them out of OHIP is that you need that money to improve health care services somewhere else. It affects 1.2 million chiropractic patients. The chiropractors say it will cost $200 million in other health care services, because people will now have to go to their local doctor for lower back pain problems and things they used to go to their chiropractor for.

What studies have you got, as Minister of Finance, or does your government have, to actually show that you're going to save money overall in the health care system and that you're going to reinvest that money for improved services? What studies do you have? Should we believe you, at 9%, or Ontario's chiropractors, who actually say this is going to cost $200 million?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): The studies we have indicate that if we can reorient primary care in the province of Ontario toward a community-based system, we can deliver a far better level of care than we do currently. The studies we have say that if we can invest more in home care, we can give more compassionate care, particularly to those who suffer chronic ailments, than we can through the current hospital model. The studies we have say that if we spend the money to provide free vaccinations to our children in the area of meningitis, in the area of chicken pox and in the area of pneumonia, we can make a truly tremendous difference in the lives of families and children.

In fact, I recall the words of the Minister of Health. A doctor practising in this area said to him, and he referred to it today, "You've done more with the stroke of a pen with these free vaccinations" than he has done in a lifetime of practise. Those are the studies we used to make the determinations we made on health care in the budget, and we're very proud of it.

Mr Wilson: First of all, if you have studies to indicate that you're going to save money overall by delisting and privatizing chiropractic services, eye examinations and physiotherapy services, then please table those studies, because that comes as great news to the millions of practitioners out there who are believed by their patients and have a lot more credibility than you do.

I was hoping you'd get up in your answer, Mr Sorbara, and indicate that you had saved some money and were going to improve services, because in the gallery today is a constituent of mine, Josh Sanderson, from Collingwood Collegiate Institute. He has a sports injury, a soft tissue injury. In May he got to his local doctor, he got to a specialist, and lo and behold, he has been told he has to wait until some time late in 2005 for an MRI. The man's in pain. He's with us today. His quality of life is diminished. He can't play sports, and you can't prove to him that you're going to have any money to improve MRI services in my part of Ontario. Shame on you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend from up there in Simcoe knows—the point he makes about MRIs, there's real truth to that. That's why, I tell my friend, we put resources in the budget for nine new MRI and CT scans. That's why we're spending that money.

But on the subject of chiropractic care, I simply remind him and his constituent that the most severe impact this delisting could have is $150 per individual per family. I understand that for some—for many—that's going to be a significant burden. But in terms of what we are going to achieve in other areas of health care, from vaccines to better home care to new MRI facilities and CT scan facilities, I think it's a trade-off worth making, and that's why we made it in the budget.

ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Deputy Premier. Your government says it wants

a new deal with municipalities. In fact, your minister earlier today talked about the new relationship you want to put together with municipalities. But in Hamilton, you are trying to download financial responsibility for the Royal Botanical Gardens to a couple of municipalities. The Royal Botanical Gardens is in serious danger of closing any day now, yet your response is to try to dump the costs on to local taxpayers, who already face a 6% property tax increase because of downloading.

Deputy Premier, will you pay the cost of keeping the RBG open, or is your new deal for municipalities no better than the paper it's written on and just another broken promise?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I understand the member is new, and so I want to stress that we're not downloading anything. First of all, RBG is important, and we're not closing the door to future discussions. We're at the table, we've been at the table and we want to work with our partners. Today the minister introduced legislation that puts partnerships into legislation, so we don't need to be told that we're not working on this.

I would ask again that you understand that our annual contribution to the RBG has remained constant, just under $1.6 million a year over the past five years. The minister has just received RBG's multi-year financial plan, and plans to have a public auditor review its books are underway. We're at the table and we're going to continue to be there. The minister is doing a great job, and I look forward to working with the member opposite to ensure that we keep RBG open.

1520

Ms Horwath: I spoke to the mayor's office in Hamilton today and my understanding is that talks are not going very well. In fact the RBG, as the Acting Premier will know, gets far less support from the provincial government than other provincial tourist attractions. It's a beautiful, serene place. It's a place where many, many people go in our community and have done so for decades. Your response, and that of the Premier, seems to be that if the municipalities won't pay, the place will close.

Minister, it's time to live up to your responsibilities. Commit today that you will provide the money to keep the Royal Botanical Gardens open so that tourists and workers will all be there at the gardens and the people of Hamilton can be sure they'll stay open. Will you do that? Will you hear this request, as you've said you would? Will you listen to Hamiltonians and to the governments of Hamilton and Halton so that your Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will also live up to the pledge that was made earlier today?

Hon Mr Duncan: I refer that to the Minister of Culture.

Hon Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): As I explained in my previous answer, I met with the board of directors of the RBG, their representative, the mayor of Hamilton and the regional municipality of Halton, and we have just received the financial plan for the next four years. Our staff is reviewing it, and we are going to have a working committee with the three partners—stakeholders—and we will come to an agreement, I'm sure, with the participation of the two other partners. We will be able to find an agreeable solution and keep the Royal Botanical Gardens open, because we know it's very important for Hamilton.

PETITIONS

CORMORANTS

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition that has been signed all over Ontario, especially a number of signatures from Jerry Ouellette's riding of Oshawa.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas cormorant populations in the Great Lakes basin have increased to ... 450,000 ... over the past several years, are continuing to grow, and are significantly depleting fish populations; and

"Whereas numerous scientific studies have clearly shown the serious negative impact on fish stocks and freshwater habitats; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources continues to study the impact of cormorants and possible management strategies; and

"Whereas the Minister of Natural Resources has committed to experimental control of cormorants at specific sites;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources to immediately begin to significantly reduce cormorant populations in areas where they are having a demonstrably negative impact on local fisheries through managed culls."

I have signed it.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp (MPAC) and are subject to property taxes; and

"Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourist economy, without requiring significant municipal services; and

"Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003; and that the tax not be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers and trailer parks, municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders."

I'll affix my signature to these 11 petitions from people across the province.

CORMORANTS

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition as well from good friends of ours, Terry and Karen up in Deep River, that reads as follows:

"Whereas cormorant populations in the Great Lakes basin have increased to ... 450,000 birds over the past several years, are continuing to grow and are significantly depleting fish" stocks; and

"Whereas numerous scientific studies have clearly shown the serious negative impact on fish stocks and freshwater habitats; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources continues to study the impact of cormorants and possible management strategies; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources has committed to experimental control of cormorants at specific sites;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources to immediately begin to significantly reduce cormorant populations in areas where they are having a demonstrably negative impact on local fisheries through managed culls."

I sign my name in full agreement.

AJAX-PICKERING HOSPITAL

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member from Whitby-Ajax.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, Mr Speaker. Whitby-Ajax would be a different side of the House.

I'm probably going to need the assistance of a couple of pages today, because I'm going to present the balance of some 10,000 petitions this afternoon. This will complete this part of the process.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas at the time the Centenary Health Centre and Ajax-Pickering hospitals amalgamated under the umbrella of the Rouge Valley Health System, a commitment was made by the Health Services Restructuring Commission that the communities of Whitby/Pickering/Ajax, according to the amalgamation agreement, would not lose a full-service hospital and would maintain all existing services; and

"Whereas municipal governments in the region of Durham have provided financial support to the Rouge Valley Health System on the understanding that Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service hospital; and

"Whereas numerous service clubs and other organizations have also raised money in support of the expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital and services provided therein such as the maternity unit on the understanding that the Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service facility; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health System has changed its strategic plan without consulting its key stakeholders, such as the residents who use the hospital, the doctors, nurses and other professional staff that work within the system and the local governments and organizations that fund the hospital; and

"Whereas this has led to a decrease in the level of service provided by the maternity unit and the number of acute care beds;

"We, the undersigned concerned citizens of west Durham, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That a full-service hospital with all the existing services at the time of amalgamation be maintained at the Ajax-Pickering site and new services added as the population continues to grow and age, as agreed to by the Ajax-Pickering General Hospital and Centenary Health Centre in the amalgamation agreement signed May 31, 1998."

WATER QUALITY

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I have a petition concerning the new Ontario Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002, Ontario regulation 170/03.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government is implementing regulation 170/03, and in doing so will affect town halls, churches and private property owners including small businesses, local community centres and campgrounds; and

"Whereas meeting the requirements of regulation 170/03 has meant and will mean excessive costs and financial burdens for all drinking water system owners; and

"Whereas there is no demonstrated proof that this new regulation will improve drinking water that has been and continues to be safe in rural municipalities; and

"Whereas Ontario regulation 170/03 was passed without adequate consultation with stakeholders throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas stakeholders should have been consulted concerning the necessity, efficacy, economic, environmental and health impacts on rural Ontario;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario abandon the implementation of and immediately repeal regulation 170/03, as well as amending the pertinent enabling legislation."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-efficient access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry or re-entry of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I sign my name to this petition.

1530

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have 750 petitions to add to the thousands I've already received, to keep Muskoka part of northern Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the district of Muskoka is currently designated as part of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the geography and socio-economic conditions of Muskoka are very similar to the rest of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the median family income in the district of Muskoka is $10,000 below the provincial average and $6,000 below the median family income for Greater Sudbury; and

"Whereas removing the district of Muskoka from northern Ontario will adversely affect the hard-working people of Muskoka by restricting access to programs and incentives enjoyed by residents of other northern communities; and

"Whereas the residents of Muskoka should not be confused with those who cottage or vacation in the district; and

"Whereas the federal government of Canada recognizes the district of Muskoka as part of the north; and

"Whereas this is a mean-spirited and politically motivated decision on the part of the McGuinty government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government maintain the current definition of 'northern Ontario' for the purposes of government policy and program delivery."

I support this petition, and I affix my signature to it.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This petition is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, and it comes from the tenants of Doversquare Apartments in Toronto. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the so-called Tenant Protection Act of the defeated Harris-Eves Tories has allowed landlords to increase rents well above the rate of inflation for new and old tenants alike;

"Whereas the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal created by this act regularly awards major and permanent additional rent increases to landlords to pay for required one-time improvements and temporary increases in utility costs;

"Whereas the same act has given landlords wide-ranging powers to evict tenants;

"Whereas before last October's elections Premier McGuinty promised real protection for tenants at all times;

"Whereas our own MPP ... called for a rent rollback (reduction) at a public event in June 2003;

"We, the undersigned residents of Doversquare Apartments in Toronto, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"(1) To immediately scrap all Tory guideline and above-guideline increases for 2004, as an elementary gesture of goodwill toward tenants who voted massively against the Tories in last October's election;

"(2) To shut down the notoriously pro-landlord Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal; and

"(3) To abrogate the Tory Tenant Protection Act and draw up new landlord-tenant legislation in consultation with tenants and housing rights campaigners."

I'm presenting this petition to you, Mr Speaker.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): This is from the chiropractic services, and it refers to the Ontario health insurance plan.

"Whereas elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need; and

"Whereas those with reduced ability to pay, including seniors, low-income families and the working poor, will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments; and

"Whereas elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"Whereas there was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

On behalf of many people in my riding of Simcoe North, I'm pleased to put my name on that.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp (MPAC) and are subject to property taxes; and

"Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourism economy, without requiring significant municipal services; and

"Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003; and that the tax not be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers and trailer parks, municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders."

There are four petitions from various people in the province. I'll affix my name to it.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here concerning chiropractic services in the Ontario health insurance plan. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it's signed by hundreds, if not thousands, of my constituents.

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I will affix my signature to this petition, as I totally agree with this.

HEALTH CARE

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It is my pleasure to present petitions on behalf of the chiropractors in my area, specifically Dr James Hadden and others whom I met with. I'm going to present these literally thousands of petitions, and I will read them into the record now.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government has announced in their budget that they are delisting key health services such as routine eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reverse the delisting of eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services and restore funding for these important and necessary services."

This is signed by thousands of patients who otherwise are in pain. I'm pleased to endorse it on their behalf.

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): On a point of order, Speaker: I thought we went in rotation, but it seems that you've got a blind eye for this spot over here somewhat, and you don't recognize us. Now, it seems to me that the Conservatives had their petition read. When our man got up here, you didn't recognize us. I'm just wondering whether this is a blind spot or whether there's some other action we should be taking to get recognition on this side.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thanks for bringing the matter to my attention, but as you realize, while it's rotation, it's those I can spot getting up first whom I recognize. I think I try to do it as fairly as possible.

OPPOSITION DAY

HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I move that the Legislative Assembly call upon the government,

To recognize that the McGuinty Liberal government made a specific campaign promise that: "We believe all Ontarians should have access to medically necessary

health care services based on need, not on ability to pay"—that's page 3 of the Ontario Liberal platform, The Health Care We Need;

To recognize that the McGuinty Liberal government in its first budget is putting the health of patients at risk by delisting health care services and no longer providing OHIP coverage for eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services for the people of Ontario;

That Premier McGuinty live up to his campaign promise and immediately reinstate OHIP funding for eye exams, physiotherapy and chiropractic services.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mrs Witmer has moved opposition day number 3.

1540

Mrs Witmer: I am very pleased to speak to the opposition day motion. I have to tell you that as a member of this House since 1990, I have never seen such anger as I have seen from people throughout the province of Ontario over the government's budget and broken promises, but in particular over their health tax and the delisting of health care services. In fact, the anger over the delisting of health care services has spread like a brush fire throughout Ontario.

People know that this is not what the Liberals promised, nor did they discuss this in their pre-budget consultations. The public truly believes that they were deceived. In fact, the polling today shows us that 91% of Ontarians do not support these health care initiatives of the tax and the delisting of optometry, chiropractic and physiotherapy services. They heard this government repeatedly, before and since, commit to improving the health care system, and they have done exactly the opposite.

In the election platform, the Liberals stated, and I quote, "We believe in a universal, publicly funded health care system that gives all the care we need when we need it." Their actions speak to the contrary. This delisting of services does not improve access to care. It does not equate to a universal publicly funded health care system; rather, it provides access only to those who can afford to pay.

This government went further in their efforts to fool the people of Ontario when they introduced the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, Bill 8. In their press release of November 27, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care stated, "We are slamming the door shut on two-tier, pay-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care in Ontario." Well, this initiative to delist services is exactly that: It is two-tier health care. It is there for people who can pay for it and not there for others. Furthermore, you can pay your way to the front of the line of the optometry, chiropractic and physiotherapy services—again, if you have the money to pay for it. So this commitment in the press release is wrong. It was misleading.

Ontarians are angry; 91% of them disagree with the initiatives to delist health care services. Today, we finding ourselves in a situation where we urge the Premier, we urge the members of the government to listen to their constituents. We know full well that your offices have also been inundated with e-mails, faxes, phone calls and letters. In fact, a few of you have had the courage to publicly acknowledge the fact, and we applaud you, that you are listening.

However, what the government has done is delist services, which is going to hurt people. They say they're doing this because they're going to improve the system. I would say that their improvements pale in comparison to the improvements we made to our health care system since 1995. We increased annual funding for health care by almost $11 billion. That was despite the fact that the finance minister, Minister Martin, reduced federal funding to the provinces. In fact, our funding grew from 1995, at $17.4 billion, to $28 billion, an increase of 60%. I can also tell you that only 12 MRIs existed in the province prior to 1995. Since that time we brought on board 52 new MRIs and 55 CAT scans, and an additional 20 MRIs and five CAT scans were scheduled for completion.

I'm also pleased to say that we struck a nursing task force. We responded to every one of the initiatives. We invested in excess of $375 million annually. We created 12,000 new nursing positions. We invested in continuing education for nurses. In fact, we were the government that created the nurse practitioner position, the first in Canada to do so. We provided funding for an aggressive—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): Would the member take her seat.

I would ask the Minister of Health and the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal to allow the member for Kitchener-Waterloo to make her points uninterrupted.

Mrs Witmer: I'm very pleased to say that our government, since 1999, invested $1.1 billion into nursing and nursing strategies. We created the nursing secretariat and the position of provincial chief nursing officer.

I would say to this government: We made the improvements to health care. We made it without the delisting of any services. In fact, we were proud to be one of the provinces that provided coverage for chiropractic services, optometry and physiotherapy.

I can tell you today that Ontarians are angry and frustrated with the decision you have made, the broken promise. Nowhere in your document did you talk about the delisting of eye services. In fact, you went so far as to say they shouldn't vote for us because we were going to delist physiotherapy.

I'll tell you, it's you who have broken your promise. It's you who are hurting seniors. It's you who are hurting those people on low incomes who cannot afford to pay for these services.

These services are important for people. This is what Janet from Ottawa says: "I am ... offended by the health care cuts....

"We trusted you to take care of us and you have let us down. If you have any integrity, you will admit the error and reinstate our health care."

We've heard from Dave, who says: "I cannot afford to pay for eye exams ... and will likely wait until something seems to be wrong and I will then allow the government to pay for my medical care." This is just a little bit of the thousands and thousands of communications that we've all received.

People are extremely upset that you broke your promise. You are not providing accessibility to health care services. You are moving down a path of greater privatization, where people are being asked to pay out of their pocket for these services. This is two-tier medicine.

What are the consequences of your actions? Let's take a look at chiropractic services. You know and I know—we all know—that if people cannot afford to go to the chiropractor, they're obviously going to have to seek treatment from their family physician or go to the emergency department, which is simply going to cause more expense and further delay on an overloaded system.

In fact, many people will simply not go for treatment. That is going to mean that they're going to suffer from increased pain, increased time off work and long-term chronic problems. It's going to affect 1.2 million citizens who use this service. That's the impact on these individuals. The decision that you have made is very, very short-sighted, because you are eroding our publicly funded health care system by removing access, particularly for those with lower economic means, to an appropriate and cost-effective health care service such as chiropractic.

1550

Let's take a look at schedule 5, the physiotherapy services we have in place that serve about six million people. Do you know that 80% of those people are seniors who are going to be hurt by the decision you have made? You are providing a gap in service for individuals who may well go through surgery, but then there's no one there to help them with the therapy to regain full independence.

We also know that much of the work that goes on in physiotherapy is prevention. It allows people to remain mobile and live independently in their own homes and not in a hospital or long-term-care facility. We also know it prevents chronic disability, and that's really important. Again, this particular decision is going to have long-term negative consequences for the health and safety of people in this province, particularly since 80% of the people who access these services are seniors.

Third, let's take a look at the impact of delisting eye exams. As Judith Parks, president of the Ontario Associate of Optometrists, notes, "People will go blind that need not." She goes on to say, "The health and safety of our patients will suffer. People will experience more preventable eye disease." In fact, according to optometrist Cheryl Letheren, "There are no pain signals to warn of the five leading causes of blindness in Canada."

We all know, and I'm surprised this government didn't know and doesn't care, that early detection of eye disease is absolutely critical to the successful treatment of many conditions. Take a look at glaucoma and macular degeneration and other diseases that can lead to blindness. We know they need to be detected early to prevent any damage to our eyesight.

The Canadian Diabetes Association has added its voice to the chorus of concerns about the delisting of eye exams for those between the ages of 20 and 65, because the reality is, folks, that your eyesight is vulnerable to disease within those years of 20 to 65. We know that the ages of 40 and 50 are just as vulnerable. The Canadian Diabetes Association says that optometrists are part of Ontario's early warning system for diabetes screening. Diabetes is sometimes assessed for the first time during a routine eye exam.

I think you can see, and I hope the members of the government understand, the risk to health and safety to which they have put Ontarians in this province, who are not going to be able to afford to pay for these services that this government promised. They promised universal access to services. I can tell you that the delisting of physiotherapy, eye exams and chiropractic is a step backwards for Ontario, a province that always considered itself the leader in the delivery of health care services. That's why we were the first to introduce the family health networks and the eye practitioners, and to expand the long-term-care facilities and home care services.

The actions of this government are not acceptable. They are hurting hard-working Ontarians who expected more, and who certainly did not expect you to break your promise. What you are doing now is breaking your commitment to medicare, supporting two-tier health care for those who can pay and moving down the road of privatization.

I call upon the Premier to live up to his campaign promise and immediately reinstate OHIP funding for eye exams, physiotherapy and chiropractic services.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I want to thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I really love the 1986 rules. Aren't they great? I've got to say that this is a much more civil way of being able to debate.

I want to take part of the time on this particular debate, on this opposition motion that's put forward by our good friend Mrs Witmer. She's getting at an issue that I think, quite frankly, is bang on as far as part of the problem that we have with this provincial budget. The provincial government, as we well know, has decided by way of this budget to delist services that are currently covered under OHIP. I would never have thought, in the last election, listening to Dalton McGuinty and all the Liberal candidates, that the Liberals would actually, when elected, come into this Legislature and delist essential medical health services in Ontario. I would never have believed it

In fact, I remember being at debates in the last provincial election with both the Liberal and Conservative candidates, where the Liberal was charging the Conservatives with doing exactly that. Participating in that as well, I was thinking to myself, "If there's one issue the Liberals and New Democrats can allow on, it is supposedly that we believe there should be a public health care system and that we should not allow the encroachment of private health care in the public system."

When you looked at the platform that the Liberals put out, if you read it, you thought you were reading NDP policy. I've always said that at times of elections and leading up to elections, the Liberals campaign like New Democrats. If you close your eyes and you don't see that they're a Liberal and you listen to what they've got to say, they sound just like New Democrats. But the minute they get elected, this great metamorphosis happens. They become transformed into Conservatives.

On this particular budget bill that we've just had introduced this spring, Bill 83, and the motion that we debated earlier in regard to the actual budget, I've got to say those Liberals are looking more and more like a bunch of Tories in a hurry. If you look at what they've done inside that budget, they're doing a whole whack of things, as my friend Rosario Marchese would say, that say, "Wow, they're in a hurry." These Liberals are trying to race to the centre and past the centre to the right side of the political landscape in Ontario quicker than the Tories dared to do it.

I've got lots of problems with my friends in the Conservative Party as far as some of the policies they had while they were in government. But on this issue, Mike Harris, in his worst nightmare or his best dream, would not have done what this government is doing. Tinker around with it, yes. Mike Harris went to every second year that you could get an eye exam from your eye doctor. But they didn't dare say, "We're going to get rid of it." Even the Conservatives understand, within the Tory party—and this is a pretty right-wing group—that you don't start delisting entire professions within health care services for all kinds of reasons. One is because politically it is not palatable by part of the electorate. Most people in Canada get it. I'm surprised that the Liberal Party doesn't get it; that is, a majority of people want a public system of health care and want to make sure that it works for them when they unfortunately get sick and have need of health care services.

The other reason we need to talk about what's really the crazy part about what the Liberals are doing on delisting essential health services like chiropractors, eye doctors, physiotherapists and others is it's going to cost us more money. We're not saving any money with this. As I see the figures in the budget, they're going to save up front, in the first full year of implementation, on the line part of the ministry budget that deals with chiropractors, physiotherapists, eye doctors and others, about $200 million. The government says, "Wow, we're bright. Oh, we're smart. We saved $200 million by saying you can't go to a chiropractor and have the chiropractor charge for part of his visit on the OHIP formulary," or the eye doctor or others.

There's a problem with that. You haven't stopped to think what's going to happen when people can't go into the chiropractor's office or can't go into the eye doctor's office to deal with their issues. Chiropractors and patients are telling us that people are basically going to stop going to chiropractors, in some cases—not all—because some people can afford it, because it's a partial system now. Let's be fair. You go to your chiropractor's office and you pay part of the fee out of your pocket and it's supplemented by OHIP, but some people need that supplement to be able to do the visits they need at the chiropractor's.

1600

So what's going to happen, and we know already, because patients are now coming to our constituency offices and telling us that—in fact, I held two press conferences this weekend, one on Friday in Kapuskasing and one in Timmins on Saturday morning, where we had the chiropractors, the physiotherapists, the eye doctors and others who attended at the office. It was quite amazing in Kapuskasing. Every one of those health care professionals in that community and Hearst showed up at the press conference. Can you imagine that? All of them. All of the eye doctors, all of the chiropractors, all those people in those critical health services, other than doctors, showed up at the press conference and said, "This is nuts. It's going to cost the system more money, because what's going to happen is patient X, who goes to the chiropractor, who can no longer afford to go because it's no longer covered by OHIP, says, 'OK, I'm not going to go see you, Doctor. I'm going to make do with my problem in my back,'" or their upper back or their leg or whatever it is. "I'll just make do."

They all tell us the same thing: If you don't treat this stuff earlier on, in many cases it gets worse, and when it gets worse, the person goes into crisis. Then what happens? The person is either going to walk into an emergency room—have you checked out how much it costs every time a patient walks into an emergency room? It's a lot more than the 10 or 11 bucks we're paying now for OHIP to supplement the services of a chiropractor. You're talking much more than eight or 10 bucks. So they're going to end up inside the emergency ward, and once inside the emergency ward they are going to basically be dispatched to some other health professional within the system who is going to be paid by the public health care system at a much higher rate than it would have cost if we had treated it in the first place. Or the person is going to go to the doctor's office, and every time you go to the doctor's office, there's a bill that's put forward to the OHIP system that's a heck of a lot more than the 11 bucks that the chiropractor charged.

Chiropractors and others within those very important health services are saying the same thing. They're saying, "Listen, in the long run we're not going to save any money." It's going to initially, in the first year of implementation, save the government some money. But as patients go deeper and deeper into crisis because they can't afford to go to chiropractic services—they are eventually going to go further into crisis, and the further into crisis they go, the more it's going to cost the health care system, because they will become patients of the public health care system either by way of the doctor's office or by way of the emergency ward or the health clinic, if you're lucky enough to have one of those in your community, as they do in Sudbury.

By the way, my good friend Mr George Smitherman is here, and I know he's looking at health services to be established by way of health clinics. I remind him, Kapuskasing is at the top of the list, George, right? Say yes, George: Kapuskasing is at the top of the list.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Where's that?

Mr Bisson: You know where that is. I know you know where that is—Kapuskasing. Anyway, that was just digressing.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: No, Kapuskasing has a big underserviced area, and I'm just saying that's one of the applications that are there.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): He said, "Where's that?" That's what he said, "Where's that?" He didn't even—

Mr Bisson: I didn't hear that, so I don't want to repeat that. That wouldn't be nice.

Anyway, I just say it's going to cost the government more money when people are diverted into the health care system.

Now, the other part about all this is what it means in underserviced areas. And this is the part that really burns me up. My good friend Shelley Martel is here, the member from Nickel Belt. She understands well that in our communities across the north, as in other places in Ontario, we have a shortage of physicians. There are numbers and numbers of patients who are without a doctor; I think in Sudbury it's 22,000.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Thirty thousand.

Mr Bisson: It's 30,000 in Sudbury. My Lord, 30,000 people in the city of Sudbury are without a family doctor. In the city of Timmins, 14,000 people out of a population of 45,000 or 46,000 are without a family doctor. We're going to say, "Don't go to your chiropractor, don't go to your physiotherapist, don't go to your eye doctor. Go to your doctor." And the person's going to say, "I don't have a doctor." "Well, then, go to the emergency department." What kind of solution is that? We're going to put our already overburdened doctors in more of a situation of having not enough time to deal with the multitude of patients they have, and it's going to divert their much-needed attention off more complex cases to deal with things that are probably better dealt with by chiropractors and other professionals, because they're trained to do that kind of work; that's what they went to school for.

So part of the problem I'm having with the decision the government is making is that if we're trying to resolve the underserviced problem of physicians in northern Ontario, as well as other parts of the province, it seems to me that the worst way to deal with that is to say, "Let's divert all patients away from other regulated health professions into the doctor's office or into the emergency ward." It doesn't make any sense.

I raised in the House the other day—I think it was yesterday—by way of a question to the Premier the other cost of all of this, and this is truly the cost that I think is probably the saddest; that is, people are going to be put at risk. I was at a press conference, as I said, in Kapuskasing, out on Byng Avenue, in front of my constituency office. We had so many physiotherapists and doctors and others that we had to move the press conference outside at one point because it was a bit too small in the constituency office to accommodate everybody else.

A woman came walking by, a woman I've known for some time. She saw this press conference, stopped and looked at what we were doing and heard what we were talking about. It just happened that her eye doctor, Dr Ravine, was one of the people attending the press conference. The woman said, "I want to say something." As a politician, when you're having a press conference and somebody pops out of nowhere and says, "I want to say something," you get nervous. But I figured, "What the heck. It's a public street, so she can have her say."

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): You're a classy guy.

Mr Bisson: I'm a very classy kind of guy. You would know that when you were in Hearst on Friday I gave a very nice welcome to my good friend Monique Smith and invited her to come back. So I know I'm a classy guy; you don't have to repeat it in the House. I blush when you say that, Monique. I really do. I have a very small ego, you must know. Any politician, I want to warn the public and members of the assembly, who says he has a small ego, don't trust him. We all have big egos; that's why we're here.

Back to my point: This particular woman walked by, saw the press conference and said, "I want to say something." OK, the media was there. So they turned to her and said, "What's the story?" She said, "I think it was three or four years ago that I decided to go see my eye doctor to get my eyes checked. I hadn't been there in a while and I thought, it's been a lot of years, maybe it's time that I get them checked. I did so because it was no cost to me. I went to Dr Ravine at the time. The visit was covered, and I figured it was a good thing for me to be doing. I hadn't seen my eye doctor in a while."

Sure as form, what happened? Dr Ravine did a routine eye exam and found out that she had a carcinoma behind her eye. As a result of the examination he found a cancer behind the eye—eventually it was found to be malignant—in its very early stages. She underwent therapy, and I think some surgery, and as a result of that she was basically saved. She's still with us today because of that routine eye exam. She just decided one day, "I haven't been to the eye doctor in a lot of years."

Then she blew the whole press conference away. She said, "I was watching the budget, and I've been watching what's going on. I probably wouldn't have gone to my eye doctor after the Liberal budget."

That's pretty serious stuff. We're talking about people's lives. I've got to believe that my good friends in the Liberal caucus and Mr Smitherman, the minister, don't want to see that kind of thing happen. But there are consequences for all the decisions we make here. I say to the government, you backed down on the soup-and-salad tax, rightfully so, when you saw that the people out there

were opposed to the soup-and-salad tax. You had the courage. It says something if you have enough courage sometimes to back off and say when you're wrong. You backed down partially, not entirely, on the LCBO privatization. You were going to privatize. Now you're saying, "Maybe," a little bit different. If you're going to back down on something, this is the one to do it on.

I've got to believe there are a lot of Liberal backbenchers, including cabinet ministers, who are getting lobbied in their constituency offices by the professions and, more importantly, by patients, who are saying, "This is a real problem, and we need you to back down."

I say to my friends across the way, this is really serious business. At the end of the day, we're all charged with one responsibility: When people stand for office, run, and are fortunate enough to be elected, we're here to serve the people who elected us and those who, unfortunately, didn't vote for us. But they're still electors; we're there to serve them. At the end of the day we have a responsibility to these people to make sure there are good public services there so that our society works, and one of those very important services is health service.

I agree with much of what the previous speaker had to say. I know our health critic has lots to say, so I want to leave most of the time to her. But I just wanted to put that on the record, because this is really serious business, and I'm hoping the government will come to its senses and back down on this.

One last point, because I see the minister wants to get up—he's probably going to say something, and I want to pre-empt what he's about to say. Are you getting up, George? You looked as if you were getting up.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm next, yes.

Mr Bisson: You are next. I'm clairvoyant: I can see this.

They're going to say, "Don't worry, we can refer. If a person has to go to an eye doctor, don't worry. You're going to be able to get referred by your family physician." That's a bit of a problem, too, because we're already saying it's too expensive. So we're going to send the patient to the doctor in underserviced areas, where there are no doctors in most cases. In our community, 14,000 people don't have doctors, so they have nowhere to go to be referred. But those who are lucky enough to have a family doctor are going to go to the family doctor to get referred, a fee is going to be charged, and then we're going to refer them back to the eye doctor who's going to charge another fee to deal with what has to be done.

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I say, let our doctors do the more complex cases. That's what they're trained for. Allow the other health care professionals who are properly trained to do the other stuff, to do what they're trained for. They're not going to save any money by having one doctor refer to an eye doctor what the eye doctor could have done in the first place. It's all about preventive medicine. We all know, number one, that a better lifestyle so we don't get sick, and number two, catching diseases in the early stages will save us health care dollars in the long run.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to join in the debate today.

Mr Bisson: Tell us you know where Kapuskasing is.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I do know where Kapuskasing is. I love the north and look forward to August when I intend to spend quite a lot of time up there.

I want to start by trying to correct the record a little bit, because the fact of the matter is that both speakers to date in this debate have indicated they don't understand the legal definition of the phrase "medically necessary." That's not so shocking when it comes from the honourable member for Timmins-James Bay, but when it comes from a former health minister, it's particularly daunting.

I want to say very clearly that as to the changes before us, which we're speaking about today, with respect to the difficult choices made to change the way Ontario provides support for some services, the Canada Health Act is clear. It talks about medically necessary services, and all the necessary protections to ensure Ontario remains consistent with the Canada Health Act are absolutely provided.

These are difficult decisions, which are put in sharp focus in part measure as a result of the speech by the member from Timmins-James Bay. His answer at the end of it all is to say, "A lot of people don't have doctors." Yes, we know that. That is unfortunately the legacy more of his party than any other, because when they were in government, they severely cut down on the training spots available. They cut down on the production line of doctors. As a result, we suffer from serious challenges, where one million Ontarians don't have access: basic medical care, medically essential care, in the form of a doctor.

What is our government's priority, therefore, and what is our budget about? It is, in a word, about priorities. It means difficult choices, but it's necessary to make difficult choices, to be able to find the amazing new support we find from immunization, which will take our province from being one of the laggards on immunization to one of the leaders.

Revamped home care with a serious focus on post-acute care, where reprofiled dollars from physiotherapy will be found: I found it astonishing that the member from Timmins-James Bay was a strong supporter of the status quo as it relates to physiotherapy in this province, when the fact of the matter is that no government of any political stripe has expanded schedule 5 clinics in Ontario since 1966.

What is the reality, then, of government-funded physiotherapy services in our province? It is a reality that those services are concentrated in the greater Toronto area. There is no regional equitable distribution of physiotherapy services across the province, but as a result of our changes there will be, because we're not getting away from all government support for physiotherapy. We are going to make that support available in our home care where there is a common assessment tool that makes sure that in our province we dedicate those precious resources to those who have the greatest demonstrated need, and by

using our community care access centres and the common assessment tool, we can ensure a more equitable distribution of these precious resources.

As a result of the difficult choices we made, we can begin to address the reality of a million Ontarians suffering from not having access to family health teams, by family providers. So we're moving forward with a massive $600-million investment to bring family health teams to communities, including many in our province, 136 communities, that don't even have access to basic medical care. Our government's priorities, therefore, are clear. It's our obligation, it's our responsibility and it is a highly ranked priority to make sure we bring progress on this file so that the former Tory government's record of moving from 55 communities underserviced when they took office in 1995 to 136 underserviced communities when they left—that is their record and we're working to address it, and that makes difficult choices necessary.

Public health renewal, another area: Shameful, woeful, inadequate investments by these two parties when they were in government. We're moving to address that so that Ontario is more properly prepared should we ever have to confront something like SARS again.

Mental health and addictions, yet one more example of the woeful record of those two parties when they were in office: no investments in mental health and addictions for 12 years.

No doubt there are difficult choices involved here, but these choices reflect our priorities: a half-billion-dollar investment in our hospitals and new money for strategies designed to address wait times around MRI and CT scan clinics, with nine new clinics coming; shortening of wait times for cataracts, for cancer, for hips and knees. These are our priorities. It's in sharp contrast to the track record of the previous government.

What did Mike Harris say in 1995 when he ran for office? I quote: "I can guarantee you that it is not my plan to close hospitals." What did he do subsequently? He closed or merged 36 of them. What else did Mike Harris say? Harris complaining—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Smitherman: You called me to order? Harris complaining—

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat. I would ask the opposition members to come to order. I would ask all members to come to order. The Minister of Health.

Hon Mr Smitherman: The member for Simcoe North defends the closure of hospitals. Unbelievable.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): You have no idea what you're talking about.

Hon Mr Smitherman: You're doing good.

Mike Harris comparing fired nurses to Hula Hoops: "Just as Hula Hoops went out and those workers had to have a factory and a company that would manufacture something else that's in, it's the same in government."

That was Mike Harris defending a decision to lay off thousands and thousands of nurses, only to be repurchased at a price that has not yet been properly calculated because of what it did to diminish the nursing profession in our province. That is their sorry record.

In contrast to the member for Kitchener-Waterloo's record on this, what did she lead in her government's budgets while she was the health minister? Reductions in OHIP support for optometry, to reductions in OHIP support for chiropractic, and she did absolutely nothing to address these enormous inequities in the provision of physiotherapy services, which, frankly speaking, have been concentrated in northern Ontario. Only one of the schedule 5 physiotherapy clinics in all the province is to be found in the north, and no action from either of these two parties when they were in government.

One further point on this: We inherited, as a government, a variety of what I might call unfunded liabilities. I talked earlier about a lack of investment in mental health and addiction that is the woeful legacy of those two opposition parties when they were in government. Let me add one more to the list. Not since there was a Liberal government in this province in 1988 and 1989 did optometrists and physiotherapists gain the benefit of a government acknowledging their need for enhanced fees. What did we inherit as a government? A 15-year, pent-up, unpaid bill and enormous expectations of significant and very costly increases to pay more for exactly the same services that have not been made available on an equitable basis.

I could talk all day about this, but because there are so many other fine members who want to, I want to close. I want to close by talking about reprofiling. This is a phrase that I have adopted because they want to make it seem that in one fell swoop we've eliminated our government's and our province's capacity to support physiotherapy services. It's simply not true. What we have done is made a move to make sure that those services are being provided, given the reality of our precious fiscal capacity, to those in our province who are most vulnerable and who have the most expressed need. How are we doing that? By enhancing physiotherapy services available in our long-term-care facilities because we know that those 70,000 Ontarians who live in long-term care are at the greatest risk, so we prioritize our services to them. And how else? By making more physiotherapy dollars available in our home care settings, so that the common assessment tool can be used to ensure the most equitable distribution of these precious resources to those in our province who are most vulnerable. These are appropriate responses to the difficult choices the government faced. They are found as well in our changes in the way that optometry services will be delivered in our province.

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First and foremost is the point that medically necessary access is guaranteed for people who have an established medical condition. That is an appropriate response to make sure that those with the greatest express need get it and, similarly, to make sure that these services continue to be provided to the youngest in our province—vulnerable—to the oldest in our province—vulnerable—and to the lowest-income in our province—vulnerable.

At the end of—

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): You're closing obstetrics in Georgetown. No more babies born in Georgetown.

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat, please. I would ask all members of the House to show appropriate respect to the Minister of Health.

Hon Mr Smitherman: That might not be enough, Mr Speaker.

The fact of the matter is that the member from Halton, so stifled as he is in his role over there that his party won't allow him to ask a question in the Legislature, has to heckle me. Perhaps he'll break through one of these days and actually get a question.

Let me close on this note: These are difficult choices, and the fact of the matter is that other members have highlighted the fact that they're hearing from constituents around this. That comes as no surprise. I recognize that there are many services in our province that are therapeutically beneficial. But that is different from being medically necessary, under the definitions of the Canada Health Act. We are, as a government, faced with making difficult choices and establishing clear priorities, and we've done that.

We know that it's a priority that home care work for people, and we're making an investment. We know it's a priority that long-term care provide a dignified and healthy setting for our seniors, and that wasn't being provided adequately. We know that all across our vast province, in community after community, people go without access to basic medical care provided by doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners working in a team.

I stand four-square behind the commitments we have made and that we're delivering on, because at the end of the day it is the responsibility of government to ensure that we use our precious resources as best we can. The decisions we have made are difficult decisions, but they are decisions that at the end of the day will provide an enhanced level of benefit to more Ontarians and that—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would once again ask the opposition members to refrain from heckling the Minister of Health.

Hon Mr Smitherman: It's the weakest row two I've ever seen.

I want to say that at the end of the day we are, as a government, charged with important responsibilities. The priorities we have made are priorities that are well received in communities. I encourage the honourable members, as they'll have the opportunity in this discussion today, to put on the line the funding increase they would rather not have seen in exchange for these important and difficult decisions that we've made.

Are they against immunization for our children? Are they against additional resources for home care? Are they against enhanced support for long-term care? Do they oppose our commitment to mental health and addictions, or is it our renewal of public health in this province that they're opposed to? These are the things that, as a result of this government's budget, we're going to be able to move forward on to create in the province of Ontario a health care system which is stronger, in better shape and more sustainable for future generations of Ontarians to benefit from. Thank you very much.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Close to half the Ontario budget is used to fund health care, and therefore close to half of all the taxes one pays to the Ontario government are already health taxes.

Back in October, I don't think the people of Ontario understood that they were voting for an increase in income tax, the so-called health tax, and I don't think they understood they were also going to lose health services at the same time. They certainly understand it now, and as has been indicated here, this government breaks more promises than a long-nosed wooden boy in a toy shop.

Ontario residents will soon pay out-of-pocket for physiotherapy, chiropractic visits, as well as most routine eye exams. The Liberals claim this will help create a stronger, more accessible health care system. I indicate to people: Don't be fooled. When it comes to health care, you'll now pay more but you'll get less. The truth of the matter is, those who cannot afford to pay for such services will experience a reduced quality of life or they will simply make more visits to their family physician or to their emergency department.

While health care taxes and other increased taxes hit the pocketbook, the real issue, according to many of my constituents, is the issue of trust. Since the budget came down on May 18, Premier McGuinty has attempted to steer the debate away from promise breaking. The fact is, the provincial Liberals said one thing during the election and did another when they were elected.

I'd like to read an excerpt from the 2003 Liberal platform: "We believe all Ontarians should have access to medically necessary health services based on need, not on ability to pay." The 2004 budget proves that this Liberal government has turned its back on its much-publicized commitment to universal health care, not only with its regressive, two-tier health tax—and remember, McGuinty promised no new taxes—but also with this regressive, two-tier delisting of vital health services.

Again, despite paying lip service to medicare, this government will no longer pay for visits to optometrists, chiropractors and physiotherapists. This is privatization. Optometrists, chiropractors, physiotherapists and their patients feel betrayed by a government that has not only turned its back on preventive eye care but has sentenced people to live with back and muscular pain if they can't afford access to this kind of assistance.

While the Liberals across the way continue to defend their actions, their move to delist health services creates a situation where health care will be denied to those who do not have the money to pay for it. In my book, that's two-tier health care. That's called privatization.

It flies in the face of promoting preventive, community-based primary health care services. Health professionals and their patients question why this government, a government supposedly committed to universally accessible health care, would now bring in this regres-

sive, two-tier privatization of eye care, chiropractic and physio services.

I support the provincial associations of chiropractors, optometrists and physiotherapists in demanding that this regressive, two-tier treatment of key health care services be rescinded.

Ms Martel: I'll be taking up the rest of the time on behalf of the NDP as health critic. It's a pleasure for me to participate in this debate.

Let me begin at what I think is the most important point, which is the point the minister made, that somehow his government had no choice, had absolutely no choice but to cut what really are essential health care services. Anyone who goes for an eye exam, uses physiotherapy or gets chiropractic services would tell you that this isn't a luxury; it's an essential health care service. It maintains them, it allows them to go to work, to have a high quality of life, to identify eye disease before that becomes serious eye damage.

It is ridiculous to listen to the Minister of Health and the Liberals say they had no choice but to cut these services. They surely did have a different choice that they could have made in the budget. I want to repeat what that choice is. You see, the government could have reversed the 35% income tax cut that was given by the Conservatives to the wealthiest Ontarians over the last number of years.

We know that tax cut has overwhelmingly benefited a small few in the province. It has come at the expense of important investments in health care and education. If the government was really serious about investing in important public services again, the government would have gone to those people who net over $100,000, and who have enjoyed a huge tax break under the Conservatives, and said, "Guess what, folks? It's time for you to make a greater contribution. It's time for you to pay a fair share. It's time for you to start paying some more to have important public services in the province, because frankly, you have been getting away without making an appropriate and adequate contribution under the Conservatives." Did the Liberals do that? No. If the Liberals had made that single tax change, the Liberals could have brought in $1.6 billion this year, if they had said to those people who have benefited the most under the Tories, "We're going to take that tax break back. You're going to contribute more."

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If the government wanted to have a different choice, the government would have gone back to the 1999 corporate tax rates in place in Ontario. In 1999, the corporate tax being paid by Ontario companies was very competitive with those US jurisdictions which are our neighbours and with which we do a great deal of our trading. But those big corporations got a huge tax break under the former Conservative government, and this current Liberal government did nothing to reverse that. This Liberal government did nothing about going to those big corporations and saying, "You know what, folks? You did really well under the Tories. It's time for you to pay your fair share to support important public services in Ontario." The government didn't do that.

The government had another choice. The government could have said very clearly that the break on the first $400,000 of payroll in the employer health tax was really designed for small and medium business in Ontario. It wasn't designed for Bell Canada or other big companies in Ontario. It was designed to give small and medium business a bit of a break. But because of that loophole in the employer health tax, big corporations like Bell Canada have enjoyed an enormous financial advantage. This government could have gone to those big companies and said, "This exemption was never meant for you. We're going to close this exemption. It's time for you to start paying what you should." The government could have raised $700 million through that.

Through those three choices in tax measures that I just mentioned, if the government had had the courage to do that, the government would have raised $2.4 billion alone to invest in health care. That's what they could have raised by those three measures for the wealthiest Ontarians and the wealthiest companies that can afford to, and should be, paying more. Instead, the government delists or cuts funding for important health care services and raises the money to pay for new health care on the backs of modest- and middle-income Ontario families. That's a choice this government made. They had different choices. They didn't have the courage to go after those who can afford to pay the most and who should be paying now.

Instead, this government is going to whack modest- and middle-income Ontarians, who are already going to be hit by an increase in their hydro rates—an increase last year, after you broke your promise about maintaining the cap until 2007, and another hydro rate increase that comes in the provisions in the budget. After these, working families are also going to pay 50% more for their driver's licence—another provision that's in this budget. And now you're going to have Ontarians, who already pay for health care through their taxes, pay again through a terribly regressive, unfair health tax and pay one more time if they have to go and access services from a chiropractor, optometrist or physiotherapist. There's something really wrong with that kind of choice. Some of the Liberals who are here today should really be thinking seriously about the choices their cabinet made for them.

I listened really carefully to the minister, and I've been asking him some questions about these issues. He said today, as he has said before—he has given some really bizarre arguments about why the government is cutting funding for these essential health care services. He makes an argument, as he did today, that in the last 15 years there has been a freeze in terms of the funding for optometrists, so governments really didn't care about optometrists anyway. Then he and his government cut funding for eye exams for all those people between ages 20 and 64. What a bizarre argument to make, that because there hasn't been an increase in the fee schedule

for optometrists for the last 15 years, the solution to the problem is then to cut OHIP funding for thousands and thousands of people who now get that covered. That is a ridiculous argument to make to try and defend a cut in health care services.

The minister made another bizarre argument, that because there has been no new establishment of schedule 5 clinics since 1964, there is now unequal access. The way we deal with that is to make sure that nobody can afford to go to the existing clinics and they can all shut down. What a dumb argument to make.

You don't get equal access by shutting down the existing schedule 5 physiotherapy clinics; you take what you have in place, continue to support them, as we did when we were in government and the Conservatives did, and then in those parts of the province where you have gaps, you create new services. You don't make a situation that might be unequal any better by making sure all of the physiotherapy clinics shut down because no one can afford to go because this government just pulled OHIP funding for those essential services. It's a silly argument to make.

There's one more argument he has made, and he made it again today in response to a question I raised. That was to say, "Ontario is the last jurisdiction in Canada that has been paying for eye exams. We should be the same as all other jurisdictions and we shouldn't pay for eye exams for the vast majority of people who now receive them." What a silly argument to make.

I thought that in Ontario we wanted to be leading in health care. We wanted to be leaders in the provision of high-quality health care. I'm not interested in a race to the bottom when it comes to support of primary care services.

What a silly argument to make, that it's OK to cancel the payment through OHIP of the vast majority of eye exams in the province because other provinces do it and now we're all going to be the same. We're all equally going to be at the bottom.

We should be leading when it comes to supporting primary care providers like chiropractors, optometrists and physiotherapists. The lame excuses and lame arguments today that I heard from the minister make me wonder what the government's priority really is and certainly points out to me the contradiction between their alleged support for prevention and what the reality is, because many of these health care providers whom we are talking about, who have had some support because their patients have been able to receive OHIP funding, are providing preventive care and they should be allowed to continue to do so. Patients in the province should have direct access to a physiotherapist, a chiropractor and an optometrist, and the province of Ontario, through OHIP, should be paying for that.

What have some people had to say about these changes? Remember, during the election, of course, the Liberals promised they wouldn't cut health care, but now after the election, like so many of their other election promises, here we are: slap, snip, cut and burn. Any number of election promises aren't being kept, and here we are looking at the demise of OHIP funding for a number of services.

Dr Edward English, chief of orthopaedics and rehabilitation at Scarborough hospital, says physiotherapy is key to the outcome of orthopaedic surgery. I quote from a May 28 article: "'Patients who have had amputations or joint replacement surgery need more than three weeks of outpatient physio to get them back functioning in the community,' English says. 'Those who can't afford to pay will lose all of the benefits of their surgery.'" He goes on to say, "'Hospitals may be forced to keep them as inpatients longer than the three to five days they spend now. Otherwise they run a high risk of reinjuring themselves, leading to further surgery and hospitalization.'"

So, you see, we're going to cut off our nose to spite our face because we're going to pretend we're going to save maybe $100 million or $150 million in physiotherapy and then you're going to have all those people staying longer in the hospital, at an enormous cost to the health care system, because they can't get access to physiotherapy in the community. Where are the savings in that, never mind quality health care for people who need it?

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Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Say one nice thing.

Ms Martel: At the Ottawa Hospital—your neck of the woods, Mr Patten—Dr Eugene Wai, who specializes in spinal surgery, says that the impact on patients who are economically disadvantaged could be severe. He said, "I would say it's not worth doing elective surgery if the patient can't afford the necessary physio." Did you hear that? That's a pretty strong reaction from someone in the know.

Mr Patten: If it's medically advised, they'll get it.

Ms Martel: No, that's the point of the exercise. The minister has said, "Do you know who is going to continue to get physiotherapy? Those people who are in long-term-care facilities." Richard, those people in long-term care facilities. All right?

He talks about home care. Isn't it interesting? Let's talk about home care, because here is Christina Boyle, president of the Ontario Association of Physiotherapists: "It also promised"—this is the budget—"more funding for home care but there's no guarantee any of that will be dedicated to physiotherapy services." She's exactly right, because if you folks go back and read your budget speech again, and look at the very small section in there that talks about home care, there is nothing in the budget document, Mr Patten, that says very clearly that any of the money going to home care is going to go to physiotherapy services.

The minister says, "Trust me." The Liberals say, "Trust us." Folks, all I have to say to you is, take a look at the poll results today, or take a look at the poll results on the weekend. Your leader's credibility is dropping like a stone. You guys have a credibility gap that's bigger than Lake Ontario. No one, but no one, believes you any

more when you make promises, because you have broken too many. All I have to say is, look at the drop of your party in the polls, folks. Look at the poll results today, where 86% of the population says they don't believe you on the promises on health care. They don't believe you. Why should they? Look at your track record, right? You were the government that got elected and you said, "We're going to maintain the freeze on hydro rates until 2007." One of the first pieces of legislation that came forward in the House was a bill to lift the cap.

You were the government that said you were going to stop the development of 6,000 houses on the Oak Ridges moraine. Those 6,000 houses are going up. They were at the time the election promise was made, for goodness' sake. You were the government that said, "People's auto insurance rates are going to drop by 20%." I'm getting the calls in my office so I know you're getting the calls in yours. People are not seeing a 20% decrease. They are seeing an increase in their auto insurance rates.

This was the group that said before the election, and Dalton McGuinty said it himself, "We're going to stop discriminating against autistic children over the age of six." You know what? The Ontario government is going to be in court tomorrow at the Supreme Court of Canada, arguing it has a right to continue discriminating, continue withholding medically necessary IBI treatment from autistic children. Your tax dollars and mine are going to pay for lawyers supported by the AG to go and attack these kids and their families one more time. You wonder why no one believes you, specifically on autism.

You were the group, might I remind you, whose Premier during the election campaign was smiling into the camera with the taxpayers' federation, signing the pledge, saying, "We will not increase taxes." Here we are with this most recent budget and we have got a new health tax alone that's going to take $2.4 billion out of the pockets of Ontarians, primarily, because it's so regressive and so unfair, out of pockets of modest- and middle-income Ontarians.

I listened to the minister get up and talk about how we're going to have physiotherapy through home care. Sorry, folks; nothing in the budget promised that, even though I wouldn't have believed it anyway. There is nothing in the budget document that said anything about the $41 million that was going into home care going to physiotherapy. What's interesting is, if you would call CCACs now, you would see that there are very few, if any, people who are getting physiotherapy as the single and only service from the CCAC; very few, if any.

So I don't hold my breath when the minister says, "We are now going to get physiotherapy through home care," because, frankly, like many Ontarians, I just don't believe it. There have been too many broken promises by the government, and the promise that somehow we're going to get more equitable access because CCACs are now going to deliver physiotherapy—well, sorry, it's not happening now, there is nothing in the budget to provide specifically for that and I don't think it's going to happen.

Interjection.

Ms Martel: I wait for you to prove me wrong, I say to Monique Smith. I wait.

You guys have a sad, sad problem in terms of your broken promises and a huge credibility gap. The problem is, there have been so many broken promises, some of which I've already referred to, that people don't believe it any more. They don't believe it when a Liberal makes a promise.

I think what is most interesting for me is to compare what the government tries to say, for example, in Bill 8, which regrettably passed yesterday in this House, where the bill says in the preamble that Ontarians and "their government"—meaning this government, I suppose—"continue to support the prohibition of two-tier medicine." Well, you know, when you cut back OHIP funding for chiropractic care, when you cut back funding for eye exams, when you cut back OHIP funding for physiotherapy services, people have to pay out of their own pockets for those services, if they can afford it. That's two-tier medicine. That's privatization of important health care services. We have—

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): It's happening right across Canada.

Ms Martel: It's happening right across Canada, so it's OK for it to happen in Ontario? Well, that's another bizarre argument that ranks right up there with the bizarre arguments that I heard from the Minister of Health. So it's happening in other provinces. That's the same kind of sad excuse that the minister gave earlier about why we are cutting eye exams: "No other jurisdiction in Canada does it, so why should we?" Maybe because we want to be a leader in health care? Maybe because we believe in preventive medicine? Maybe because we support optometrists, because we know they are highly qualified, skilled practitioners who can diagnose eye disease? Maybe we should pay for all those things because it is right thing to do. Maybe it is kind of a sad excuse to cut off funding for that because everybody else is.

You're the government who said very clearly in the preamble to Bill 8, which was just passed yesterday: "continue to support the prohibition of two-tier medicine." That's what you said in Bill 8. I didn't say that; you did. I certainly pointed out the contradiction during the public hearings and the debate on second and third reading, because there's a huge contradiction.

When, in the budget, you cut off OHIP funding for important health care services, you promote, you reinforce, you increase two-tier medicine in Ontario. That's what you do. Because the fact of the matter is, those people who can afford to pay for an eye examination will be able to get it, and those who can't will go without. Those people who can afford to pay the full fee for a chiropractor will be able to buy high-quality health care, and those who can't afford it will go without. Those people who can afford to pay for a physiotherapist will purchase access to high-quality health care, and those who can't afford it will go without. That's two-tier medicine. That's what you are reinforcing with your delisting of these important services.

I don't care if other provinces are doing it; we shouldn't be doing it here. That's the point that should be made. We especially should not be doing it here because these Liberals promised during the election campaign that there wouldn't be cuts to health care services. That's what the promise was.

These cuts will do nothing to improve people's access to health care. More importantly, at the end of day, these cuts are going to cost the health care system oh, so much more. They really are.

1650

I look in my own community, where there are 30,000 people without a family doctor, and I say to myself, "If the minister decides, as he has been musing publicly in the paper that he will, that you're going to have to get a referral from a family doctor to see an optometrist in order to get your eye exam covered as medically necessary, where is the saving in that?" Right now, it doesn't cost you to go to see an optometrist. You don't have to get a referral from a family doctor to see an optometrist. In Ontario, you have direct access to that highly qualified health care professional. What sense does it possibly make to force someone to go to their family doctor in order to get a referral to the eye doctor, especially, for example, in the case where someone already has diabetes, where someone has been under the care of an optometrist for diabetes? Now the government of Ontario is going to tell them, "Go see your family doctor to get a referral to the optometrist." What kind of sense does that make?

You guys had better read this, and I challenge you to go read what he said in the paper, because he said very specifically that you will have to go to a family doctor to get a referral.

Interjection.

Ms Martel: No, he did not say that. I'm sorry. You should read what he said in response to the question that I raised. How much sense does that make? None.

Do you know what's going to happen in my community, where there are 30,000 people without a family doctor? Now they're going to end up at the after-hours clinic, with someone who doesn't even know them and where the charge to the system is going to be that much more because of the premium paid in an after-hours clinic. Or they're going to end up in the emergency ward trying to see a doctor there to get a referral, and that's going to cost the health care system a whole lot more.

There are no savings through that process; none at all. Never mind those people who may not have diabetes, who, like the woman from Kapuskasing, won't go see an optometrist because now they can't afford it any more and whose tumour behind the eye, like our friend in Kapuskasing, will go undiagnosed because that person couldn't afford to go to the doctor, and didn't go and get a referral because there was no indication that that visit would be medically necessary.

No savings here whatsoever. It will cost the health care system a whole lot more. It will come at the expense of patient care, patients who now use these very practitioners very much for preventive purposes but also for rehabilitation, and it will not save the health care system one cent. I predict that by time this is over, we will have paid a whole lot more by people who can't get the care they need, can't afford to, and end up in a much worse state or end up at an after-hours clinic, which costs more, or at the emergency ward to try to get prescriptions or to try to get some relief.

We shouldn't be operating to the bottom, which is what this government really wants to do. We should be ensuring that we don't have two-tier health care, just like the government promised in Bill 8. But that's not what is happening. That's going to cost the system a whole lot more. That's going to be really bad for patient care.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Smith: I am delighted to speak today to this motion and to respond to some of the grand statements made by my colleague from Nickel Belt and my colleagues from Kitchener-Waterloo and Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Patten: Correct the record.

Ms Smith: I think we do have to correct the record.

I'll be sharing my time with a number of my colleagues in the Liberal caucus who are happy to defend this budget and speak to the great steps that will taken to improve health care and education.

In the campaign of last year, we made many promises. We promised to improve health care and education. In this budget, we are taking steps to do just that. Earlier this afternoon the member for Leeds-Grenville asked us as a Legislature to put aside the deficit for a moment. I find that laughable, at best. It is impossible to put aside a $5.6-billion deficit that that party created and that party left us with.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): What's $6 billion between friends?

Ms Smith: Between friends, I think it was up to $6 billion by its final calculation, and we had to deal with that as we prepared this budget. We also wanted to ensure that we met our promises to improve health care and education in this province, and so we moved forward. We made very tough decisions. As the minister referred to, we had a number of tough decision to make and we made those. We are making $2.4 billion worth of new investments in health care in 2004-05. That is a substantial investment in health care and will go a long way to improve health care in this province.

I want to speak today to a couple of really specific issues on the health care front. Mr Speaker, as you and the members of this Legislature know, I undertook a review of long-term care over the last six months. Over that time, I had an opportunity to visit over 25 long-term-care homes and speak to a number of stakeholders. What I heard was a sense of continuing despair about the state of our long-term care in the province.

What we've done in this budget is commit to $191 million of new spending in long-term-care homes across the province. That will go a long way to including 2,000 new staff people in those homes, which will include

activities people, who will be working with our long-term-care residents to ensure that their quality of life improves and that their lives are filled with activities and interesting things to fill up their days. It will include 600 more nurses in our long-term-care homes. It will include more lifts to assist our nurses in providing the care that our residents need. It will also include physiotherapy, which the member from Nickel Belt was severely concerned about.

As well, as I did my review of long-term care, I understood from many seniors and seniors' advocacy groups that their preferred method of living out their lives was to live in their homes. They want to age in place, and I understand that. To that end, this government is providing home care for an additional 95,000 Ontarians by 2007-08. We are going to improve home care. We are going to allow our seniors to age in place, to live in their homes as long as they wish. It is the best place for them.

When I was knocking on doors last fall, I came across a number of seniors who had just recently had their home care cut. One in particular had lost her home care laundry service. She was 92 years old. She lived in an apartment complex with a number of other seniors. The other seniors spoke to me about her plight, and one particular woman, who was 86 years old, was rallying the neighbours in order to ensure that the laundry could be done for this resident so that she could stay in her apartment as long as possible.

In the future, that will no longer be necessary. We are putting the funds in place to ensure that home care is in place, to ensure that that senior in my riding can stay in her home as long as she physically can, as long as the needs are not so great that she has to be in a long-term-care home.

To that end, we are investing in long-term-care homes so that when the move is necessary, the supports are in place and the homes are at a level where you or I would feel comfortable that our parents could live there, that we would be happy to have our parents live there. That is our goal: to ensure that the long-term-care homes across the province are at a level such that anyone in this room would be happy to see their parents live there.

So I think that our government has made some tough choices, yes, some choices that not everyone agrees with, true, but some important choices that will ensure that our health care across the province improves and that Ontarians see results. I am sure that the member for Nickel Belt will be here in four years to ensure that she acknowledges the results and the improvements in long-term care and in health care across the province.

Mr Speaker, I appreciate the time that you've given me to speak to this today.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm pleased to join in this opposition day, and I'll just refresh the memory of those watching what it's about:

Mrs Witmer has moved "To recognize that the McGuinty Liberal government made a specific campaign promise that: 'We believe all Ontarians should have access to medically necessary health care services based on need, not on ability to pay'"—that's page 3 from the Ontario Liberal platform, The Health Care We Need.

"To recognize that the McGuinty Liberal government in its first budget is putting the health of patients at risk by delisting health care services and no longer providing OHIP coverage for eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services for the people of Ontario;

"To ensure that Premier McGuinty live up to his campaign promise and immediately reinstate OHIP funding for eye exams, physiotherapy and chiropractic services."

That's what we're discussing this afternoon. This is directly related to the health premium that's just come in in the recent budget—the health premium, tax, levy, whatever you want to call it—on the hard-working families of Ontario that starts at $20,000. You only have to make $20,000, and then you start paying the $300. This from the Premier of Ontario, who so very clearly said in the election campaign, "I won't lower your taxes, but I won't raise them either." Not one cent was he going to raise your taxes, and yet we have this massive health premium raising over $2 billion in one full year, and this from the Premier who publicly signed the Taxpayer Protection Act. I think that's why only 9% of Ontarians think that the Premier is doing a good or very good job, and some 84% think that this health premium is a bad idea.

1700

A question I would ask is, where is the money going? There's over $2 billion being raised but it doesn't seem to be getting spent on health care. In fact, in the budget bill that's currently before this Legislature there is no direct tie to link this new money that's being raised with health care spending. In fact, if you look at the budget papers, in the past few years in the hospital sector, one of the biggest parts of the budget for health care, there have been in our time 8% annual increases, big increases in funding for the hospital sector. In this year's budget there is half of that. We're seeing 4% spending in the hospital sector, so in fact we're seeing spending go down. I would have to ask where the money is being spent.

I only have a few minutes and I did want to talk about what it means to the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka to be losing these important services like chiropractic services. I received a letter from one of my constituents that very clearly enunciates some of the concerns this constituent had. I'd also like to mention that I've received thousands of petitions with complaints about these services being taken away from the people of Ontario. I'll very quickly read a part of this letter:

"I have just been informed that the government may decide, in the next few days, to delist chiropractic services from OHIP. So much for their promise not to reduce access to health care"—another broken promise.

"The news to eliminate funding was very disconcerting to me since I see my chiropractor on a weekly basis and do not have extended health coverage. I require the regular services of a chiropractor and would not be able to go as often as I do now since I would not be able to afford the extra charges. I have a temporomandibular

joint problem ... which causes headaches and also have chronic upper and lower back problems. The chiropractic adjustments keep my headaches under control as well as the other conditions that I seek treatment for, without the use of drugs which I feel only mask and do not eliminate the problems. I do not want to be running to the emergency department whenever I have a major headache or to a family clinic where I would not be able to see my own doctor.... Eliminating this coverage will end up costing the government far more in additional physician, emergency department and hospital visits since less than 0.4% of the health budget is spent on chiropractic services. The Manga report 1993 ... is proof that chiropractic services, for back pain, is the most cost-effective form of treatment for a patient...."

That's about all I have time for because I know we have other members who would like to speak to this.

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): It's a pleasure for me to speak on today's motion. Like so many of these debates here in the Legislature, I think the best way to understand the motion and why we should be opposed to it is to go back to the election campaign. I think what you will find in the election campaign is that a certain reality probably occurred to every candidate in the election, certainly to everyone in the Legislature, and that is the wisdom of voters. I think you can never underestimate how smart voters are. As I went from door to door and started talking about the two basic themes in this election campaign, education and health care, what they told me about health care was that they wanted to see it fixed. They wanted to see more resources put into health care. But what they also said is that they recognized that health care has, unfortunately, become a black hole, and that's not a partisan comment. Any government, no matter what its stripe, no matter what its level, whether we're talking about the federal government or the provincial government, is faced with the fact that an aging population and changing technologies mean that more and more money is going into health care. What people said to me during the campaign was, "Fix health care," but they said to fix health care in way that's responsible and accountable. They realize that we could keep spending and spending, but we have to make choices and we have to make decisions.

The recent budget was about putting those principles into practice. It was about making very tough decisions. It was sitting down and saying we want to increase the health care budget, which we did—I think over $2 billion—but at the same time, we want to identify those bundles of services that are the most important to the people of Ontario. That doesn't mean the ones that we've delisted are not important, but what it means is that as a government we had to make those very tough choices to determine what the priorities were for Ontarians.

What were they? I could not believe my ears when the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka said, "I don't know what's happening to that $2 billion." I couldn't believe it when I heard the member for Nickel Belt going on and on and on about the fact that we're not improving health care.

I ask about an additional 36,000 cardiac procedures per year; an additional 2,300 joint replacements each year; funding nine new MRI and CT sites; an additional 9,000 cataract surgeries per year; more than $600 million to support and reform primary care, something which is of huge concern to my area where we have a doctor shortage. That's not to mention the critical investments that we're making in terms of long-term care for our seniors, which my colleague from Nipissing outlined with such passion.

These are tough decisions. There's absolutely nothing wrong with the delisted services. They are excellent services that people take advantage of, but unfortunately we are in a reality now where we need to make choices. All governments are faced with that. For that reason, we decided to put our money to the top priorities and unfortunately delist them.

It's something to hear the Conservative Party bring forward this motion today being critical. It was the same member for Kitchener-Waterloo, who, as Minister of Health, decreased the amount of money that was going toward chiropractic care every year. That was a tough choice. People who are in responsible positions of running our health care system have to make tough choices. No one liked to make them, but they were necessary.

It's for that reason we put forward a budget that met the true needs of the people of Ontario, which was a responsible budget, which was an accountable one, which is why I plan to vote against today's motion.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I don't know whether to laugh or cry listening to the Liberal member for Kitchener Centre talking about the wisdom of voters. The Liberal government has shown complete contempt for the people who elected them to office almost eight short months ago, when they had a platform—I think the latest count is something like 30 broken promises and the two centrepieces of their campaign: no tax increases and balanced budgets.

Of course what we're talking about today is the delisting of very critically important health care services for people of Ontario, another promise that they've broken, and a serious one for so many citizens across this province, especially those of low and modest income, hard-working families, many of whom are having a tough time today meeting their ends, paying electricity bills, another broken promise by the Liberal government. We can go on and on: auto insurance, another broken promise.

These are building and building and building on the average citizens of Ontario and we're seeing the impact. The member talks about the wisdom of voters. The cynicism of voters out there now, based on the litany of broken promises, is really saddening for all of us who believe in public life and public service. To see what the Liberal Party has done in this province, and what they're doing to their federal colleagues, is shameful, at best.

The member for Kitchener Centre and other Liberals talk about making tough choices. They haven't made a tough choice. As usual, the Liberal way is the easy way: "Let's dig into other people's pockets. Let's increase their taxes." That's the easy way. That's not a tough decision. It's a dumb decision, a stupid decision, but it's certainly not a tough decision. It's a typical Liberal decision. It's a tax-and-spend decision.

That's what defines Liberals. When they had the opportunity to serve as government of Ontario for five years back in the 1980s, what typified that tenure? Tax and spend. There were 32 tax increases over five years. They almost doubled the spending in the provincial government. They put this province into an economic tailspin. That's where we're going to head now because of this incompetent tribe over there that we are unfortunately saddled with for the next three and a half years.

1710

I think there's a conspiracy afoot here. We heard the finance minister talk about this being a magical budget—magical, I guess, in many ways. Seven months ago, the Liberals were up here in the polls. Now they're down here. Is that magical? I guess that's magical. I call is sleight of hand. Randall Denley, in the Ottawa Citizen, described the budget as "an audacious deception job." I'd use "con job" as a more appropriate way of describing it.

Before I conclude, I want to read one note. This deals with chiropractic care:

"I am writing you to express my deep concern over the McGuinty government's proposal to remove ... the allowance for chiropractic care....

"My wife and I are both seniors. As you get older your bones and joints don't function as well as they should and you frequently need the help provided by chiropractic services. I am on a pension and my wife is not yet 65 so her medicine is not covered. Once I retired I found I had no medical plan. I have to pay for her prescriptions and our chiropractic care when we accept the limit currently" in place. "This places a heavy burden on a person with a fixed income. Removal of the chiropractic coverage would make it very difficult to survive."

How many other Ontario citizens are in that kind of position—seniors on fixed incomes, elders who are just above this $20,000 magical limit that the Liberal government has set who are now going to be faced with this additional extra burden on their income? They're having a tough time putting food on the table, putting gas in their car, paying the insurance on their home, on their car. This government now has imposed this on them. It's unconscionable. They should all resign. They should move out and let a new government in that will really respect the wishes of the people of Ontario.

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): It's amazing that the member from Leeds-Grenville never mentioned the $5.6-billion deficit, the mess that was left for this province.

Ontario voted for change in the last election. Change is coming and it is a change for the better. It is change that will be marked by a restoration of common sense in the programs and systems that Ontarians feel strongly about and that they want to see protected and enhanced, like health care, education, and support for seniors, children and communities.

I know that the health care levy is not what Ontarians voted for directly, but with the $5.6-billion deficit, denied by the former government, it represents an infusion that was necessary in order to build a stronger and better system that we need and will get as the Liberal plan unfolds over the next four years. It is a fact that the many real benefits that will come from our budget initiatives will take a bit of time to make themselves obvious, but we will see better health care, shorter waiting times, more community-based mental health care, home care and family health services for all Ontarians, including seniors and children.

These changes will not occur overnight, but they will happen. That is why the Premier and our caucus remain firm in standing by the plan that is going to take us in an important new direction. He is keeping his most important promise of restoring public services to where they work for all Ontarians. Governing means making hard decisions. Delisting chiropractic, physiotherapy and routine eye exams is not in any way to suggest that these are not valuable services. But, on balance and after much consideration, it was decided there are more urgent priorities that need attention now within the resources available.

I'm particularly pleased that we will be moving to provide services where they are most appropriately given. Some 95,000 seniors—those released from hospital and the chronically ill—will be able to receive care at home, thereby freeing up hospital beds for the acute cases they most appropriately serve.

I was on the health, recreation and social services committee in the city of Ottawa when those home services were cut and left people who were able to take care of themselves with their families—those people moved up, not from the $50-a-day home care cost, but to the long-term care, $160 a day, or to the acute care, $800 a day.

I am pleased that 6,000 Ontarians will now receive end-of-life care at a time when their needs must be met in the most sensitive way possible. I am delighted that we will be creating 150 family health teams to help address existing gaps in primary care.

I give the minister notice now that I already have professionals in my riding anxious to participate. Of great importance is the $25 million that's being directed to the support and treatment of children and youth with mental health problems. It is well known that early detection and intervention is crucial in stemming the tragic slide of young people into mental illness. Resources directed to early intervention are a huge investment in their futures and in the health of our province. In my community of Orléans, individuals with mental health problems and their families do not at present have the support, early detection and intervention they need.

In 1993, there was a target to reverse the share of funding from 70% institutional and 30% community-based to the opposite, to 70% of the mental health dollars being spent in the community. This happened in some areas, but in Ottawa we're still at 30%, while the provincial average is 58%. We must get more resources into the community for mental health.

A young woman with anorexia met with a few of the Ottawa-area MPPs a few months ago. She told us that the system had given up on her. She was to be institutionalized for life. A support group came along, and now she is attending university, holding a job and living on her own as a productive member of our community. This beautiful young person is now slowly rebuilding her life and works every day at it, thanks to the help she received in her community.

We have much to be proud of in Canada in the sense of security we have in a health care system that is there for anyone, regardless of economic status. It is a fact that no one will be denied care when they need it, a remarkable achievement. But we need to come to the rescue now, each of us, to preserve what we most value. We will be held accountable for delivering on the promise of a revitalized health care system, and we will live up to that promise. These are tough choices to make, and we have made those choices.

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today to support the member for Kitchener-Waterloo's opposition day motion.

I have to tell you, to begin with, I talked to a friend of mine in Orillia, a chiropractor, Dr Murray Miller. He's part of a group that's out soliciting names for the petition that many of us are reading in here today. I can tell you that not only in Simcoe North, Orillia, Midland and those communities, but right across the province, a tremendous number of people are concerned about the cost of delisting, particularly of chiropractic services. This is what I'm hearing a lot about now.

Obviously, physiotherapy and optometry were not areas where the government campaigned. We didn't read about any delisting of those services in their campaign documents. Mr McGuinty was wandering around the province last September promising everybody what they wanted to hear. He never promised anybody that he would delist services. So I can tell you, there are a lot of people extremely disappointed. As Mr Runciman said, it will have a negative effect on them in their pocketbook as well.

Certainly, when we look at the overall picture and we see the polling that was done today, no one believes these people any more. It's as simple as that. Nine per cent of the people in the province who were polled believe Dalton McGuinty is telling the truth. I cannot believe it, that in a matter of eight months—eight months since October 2, 2003—he's dropped to 9% support.

I'm guessing they'll have to be looking for another leader for the next election. They would never be able to go into an election with this guy as the leader. So right away you'll see the Liberal Party start to fracture. There will be some potential—Mr Kennedy and Mr Cordiano will come forward again and they'll want to become the new leader. Any people who are supporting the Liberal Party don't believe them; they don't believe McGuinty. Quite simply, they'll try to oust him before the next provincial election and try to come up with some other reason why the people in the province should actually support them.

But you know, what was really disappointing to me, in light of all of the delisting, was that a rumour came out that they were about to reinstate sex change operations. I couldn't believe it. With all the people who were being damaged with the lack of funding and lack of assistance for chiropractic, all of a sudden they floated that trial balloon by. And immediately, of course, the Premier's office stomped on that, put it right out—we've got all the clippings, etc—and now that's a fact of life. He was about to relist sex change operations after delisting optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic. That's very, very disappointing.

1720

I'd like to say in closing—we have a couple of more speakers who want to make a few comments—that we will never, ever, support this piece of legislation. The opposition motion that's in front of you today, I hope some of the members of the government side will either support it—maybe a lot of them won't appear for the vote. It looks like there are not a lot of them coming in tonight because they're disappointed. We all know what they've said in the past with their comments. They're disappointed in the government and in the fact that this party campaigned on one set of rules and then turned around and brought in these things that amount to a bunch of broken promises.

I'd now like to turn it over to my other colleagues and give them a chance.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I'm going to make a couple of points. I know the member for Mississauga East wants to speak, but I want to make a couple of points quickly.

First of all, we have to look at this budget document as an organic document. We have to look at the whole document. We can't pull apart individual pieces and not consider what the impact of the whole is going to be. My contention is that the impact of the whole budget is going to be greater than the impact of one part.

The second point I want to make is that we were absolutely committed, and we were asked by the people of this province, to make investments in home care, in our crumbling school buildings, in hiring nurses, training doctors, mental health services, palliative care, community health care centres—and the list goes on. All of those things received support in our budget. That's what we were asked to do.

I was sort of fretting about this the other night. I decided to go back to the documentation from my activist days—which went on for quite some time—and I pulled out the newsletters that were produced by the Citizens for Local Democracy in Toronto, just to have a reality check

about when it was that we knew that things were going off the rails, that this province was at risk. Well, it was very early in the Tory agenda. It was extremely early. It was in 1996, 1997, when talk of forced amalgamation started to happen, talk of forcing together school boards that had no business being forced together, creating huge, monolithic institutions that couldn't meet the needs of their communities.

In fact, I looked at a brochure that our group put out at that point. As it happened, on Saturday, February 15, 1997, up to 9,000 people in Toronto marched from north of Eglinton, Montgomery Avenue, to Queen's Park to protest the forced amalgamation of the city. During that same time period, we were not only talking about the forced amalgamation; we were talking about the degradation of publicly funded institutions and infrastructure in this province. A brochure that we put out at the time was really prophetic in terms of what this budget does.

Mr Runciman: Did you say "pathetic"?

Ms Wynne: Prophetic. On home care, we were quoting people who had written in to Citizens for Local Democracy about their concerns. One person said, "My mother's in hospital.... I can't look after her, but I feel terrible that she's occupying a bed when others can't get care." That was in 1998. We need home care. We knew it then; we know it now.

On education: "Last year we lost junior kindergarten and some ESL at my son's school. What will be left in two years for my youngest?" We needed money in education then and we need it now.

On housing: "My neighbour got downsized a year ago. Now they live in one of those motels for people without housing. I worry that could happen to us." We need affordable housing. We needed it in 1998; we need it now.

Consultations: We did an in-depth consultation before we brought this budget out. Here's what one of the citizens in Toronto was saying in 1998: "The government's been changing"—that's that government—"everything at once, no matter what we say. What happened to discussion and public debate?" Well, we brought back discussion and public debate, and I'm not surprised that my friends opposite don't have any understanding of how that works.

Finally, on municipalities, the Premier—that was Mr Harris at the time—promised that downloading wouldn't cost us more. Why do we have to choose between rec centres and garbage pickup and road repair? We need them all. Our budget recognizes that. Our budget recognizes that cities need support.

That's why I am not going to be supporting this motion. We have to look at the whole budget, and I'm supporting it because we're moving in the right direction. We're repairing the damage that was done by the previous regime.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'm sure they'll be repairing the damage to their tattered reputation as well, trying to do something about that. The member from Nickel Belt spoke earlier about the credibility gap that this party, the Liberal Party, has created with this litany of broken promises. I would suppose that Evel Knievel at his prime would not try to jump that gap. He tried the Grand Canyon, but this is much, much wider than that. Nine per cent of the people of this province believe that this party is trustworthy. The Premier has the approval of 9% of people of this province.

But on this delisting, it is such a betrayal to working families, to seniors struggling in this province—such a betrayal. Not only are we delisting these essential services, but into the bargain, we're telling them to dip into their pockets some more to pay for these OHIP taxes, OHIP premiums. Less for more.

I have people in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke who depend on physiotherapy and chiropractic services just so they can continue to work. They need those services so they can go to work in the morning. They don't have a job that provides medical benefits so that they will have these paid for by their employer. They've got to pay for them. Now it's coming out of their pocket. They can't afford it.

This government broke its promise, betrayed and threw away the trust of the people of Ontario and came out with this policy in this budget. It is a crime what they are doing to working families in the province of Ontario. My colleague the learned and sage member from Leeds-Grenville touched on it.

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): Saged?

Mr Yakabuski: Sage.

The results of this policy are going to hurt not only the health care system, but the economy itself. These people are going to have to be showing up at emergency wards in my riding when their back is out and they need help. They're going to be going to the after-hours at the hospital, to the emerge. Does that make economic sense for the health care system? Absolutely not.

This is a terrible mistake. I don't know where they got their advice. I don't know who is leading this party—nobody seems to know who is leading this party—but it has got to stop. They have got to somehow get a whack on the head and come to their senses, take a look at this budget and see what it's doing to the people of the province, revisit it if necessary, rewrite it if necessary, but stop this attack on working families in Ontario

Mr Fonseca: I'd like to look at this motion in the full context of the budget and where we came from, as the member from Don Valley West, my esteemed colleague, did.

Earlier in the day, the member from Leeds-Grenville talked and said, "I want to forget the nightmare that we put this province in." He said, "I don't want to think about the $6-billion deficit that we left. We don't want to talk about that." They didn't want to talk about that. They don't want to talk about how they slashed water inspectors, how they slashed meat inspectors, how they fired nurses, how they closed hospitals. They don't want to talk about the crises they left this province in. They don't want to talk about Ipperwash. They don't want to talk

about Walkerton. They don't want to talk about Aylmer. Here's what they want to talk about. Here's what they're telling everybody.

As the great Mayor Hazel McCallion said in Mississauga, "If you want to cut taxes, tell me what services you want cut." That's where the member from Leeds-Grenville is always going talking about taxes. Well, member from Leeds-Grenville, tell the people of Ontario what services you want cut, because you've left this province in disarray and we are fixing your mess, the huge mess you have left us in.

1730

Here's what we're saying: yes to 2,300 new joint replacement surgeries; yes to a $448-million increase for home care; yes to nine new MRI machines. Here's what we're saying to you also: no to your long waiting lines; no to losing dignity and respect for the people of Ontario; no to staff shortages in hospitals and nursing homes; no to underfunding of hospitals; and no to you.

Here's what we're doing: In health care we had to make tough choices. It's a transformation of health care.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat. I would ask the opposition members to please come to order. The member for Mississauga East.

Mr Fonseca: Tough choices had to be made, and when those tough choices had to be made, do you know what? We could have held the line on spending and here's what would have happened. We could have closed all the hospitals in Toronto. That would have helped with the $6-billion deficit that was left behind. We could have invested nothing in schools and allowed them to crumble. We could have hired no more nurses, probably have had to fire many nurses.

We could have allowed services to deteriorate, but that was the wrong choice. The right choice was to set out a four-year plan, which we have. The right choice was to fix our health care system—or lack thereof is what we found. What we're working on is the transformation of a health care system that we believe in, that will be sustainable and there for everybody.

We're helping hospitals, putting them on a sustainable footing with long-term funding. We're making sure we get people out of hospitals and into their homes and get the care they need in their homes through home care, through that investment.

I want to talk about an incident I've mentioned before that happened in my riding. Due to the destruction of services by the previous government, it caused a horrific tragedy in my riding. The breadwinner of a family, a father, was murdered three months ago. He was murdered by another constituent. A young man, 24 years old, with schizophrenia murdered this breadwinner, a tragedy that never had to happen.

Three weeks ago his parents came into my office crying, his mother and father, saying, "We did all we could, everything for our son. When he was on medication he would be all right, but he thought the medication was killing him." That happens with schizophrenics sometimes. They think the medication takes away their life, their strength. They don't feel well, so they get off the meds and then they have relapses. They should be getting help by getting some mental therapy and being in a home getting some therapy. This family often looked for that help, but the help was not there because mental health had not seen an increase in funding in 12 years, even though many more people are in need of that service.

As this mother and father cried in my office, at that moment I knew we were making the right choices. We've put $65 million—not seen before—back into mental health, another $25 million into children's mental health services.

The mother and father, as they sobbed there, talked about their story, their son and the horrific life he has had to endure. He now sits in the Queen Street mental health facility. After sleeping for three days, after that tragic incident, he woke up to the tragedy he had caused, and he will have to live with that for the rest of his life. His parents said, "We don't fault you. We don't fault the police. We don't fault the hospital. We fault the system. The system let us down, because when my son would be in hospital, he'd be there for 48 hours; they would let him go."

The police would drive him home, and they would say to the family, "If your son is to get a bed in a mental health facility, he has to cause bodily harm to himself or bodily harm to another." Another option was that they could throw their son out on the street. He would be a street person, as many are, and that would be one of the ways their son would be able to get the mental help he needed. "In the end, we found ourselves in a tragic situation, having lost the breadwinner of a family." By not taking preventive measures and investing in mental health, this has cost lives in our great Ontario and caused tragedy for many, in many communities.

Now let's look at what many are saying about the decisions we had to make. Dr Barbara Everett, CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association, said, "Funding for mental health and addiction services is an excellent investment by the government." Hilary Short, from the Ontario Hospital Association: "Investments announced today in areas such as primary care reform, public health and home and community care are much needed and hold the promise of easing pressures on hospitals."

As the PA to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, I have had stakeholder after stakeholder come through my office, saying this was the right thing to do. This is going to put Ontario on the right footing as a compassionate province, because that previous government sucked the compassion out of this province. That's why the people, on October 2, 2003, said bye-bye to the Tories.

Ms Scott: I'm pleased to rise today in support of the motion put forward by my colleague Elizabeth Witmer to ensure that the Liberal government lives up to their promises and to reinstate OHIP funding for eye exams, physiotherapy and chiropractic services. It seems strange

today that we have to bring a motion forward in order for the Premier and the government to live up to the campaign promises they made, but it's strange times. I guess we're just going to have to beg them to reinstate very essential services to the people of Ontario.

Nowhere in the campaign did they mention health care premiums or delisting of any of the necessary health care services. My riding alone has some of the most beautiful scenery in Ontario but people have very limited incomes. They don't have extra cash to throw around. They're struggling financially already, especially with the changes brought about by this government in the last eight months.

The benefits of chiropractic services are clear. In case the members opposite haven't heard of preventive care before, chiropractic services are preventive care. They're not frills for people. They can provide life-saving benefits.

1740

I want to give you a couple of examples of the hundreds of people in my riding who have been contacting me. One is a former pastor of mine who says, "I would urge you" to get the government to stop this delisting of chiropractic service. "This is the only treatment that has kept my wife, Deb, active and off of disability. She has had a bad back that has hindered her for years. She attends a multidisciplinary back clinic in Orillia that has practitioners from every viewpoint with regard to joint and back problems.... therapists and chiropractors work together.... Where do the Liberals get off dictating the choice of care" that we receive?

Other people from my riding: The optometrists are really mad. There is the letter from Judith Parks of the Ontario Association of Optometrists. "In addition, family physicians already face huge patient workloads and stresses due to their own funding issues under OHIP. One hundred and forty communities across the province have already been designated as underserviced for family practitioners. In the city of Kawartha Lakes, we're short 35 practitioners. The only way to ensure that adult patients continue to seek treatment and have access to needed diagnostic checkups is to ensure that they continue to be covered under OHIP for visits to their optometrists for sight-threatening diseases."

Please, I want the Minister of Health to reconsider. When Dalton McGuinty is at 9% in the polls, is that not proof enough that you're on the wrong track in delisting the chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services? I'm happy to speak to this motion. I again say, please do not delist the three services just mentioned, on behalf of all the people in my riding who are contacting me. I'd like to share my time with the member from Durham.

Mr O'Toole: Earlier today I presented some of the thousands of petitions I have received from the chiropractors in my riding. I want to thank them: Dr James Hadden, who arranged it, along with Dr John Clark from Newcastle, as well as Dianne Lott from Bowmanville, Kevin McAllister and Geoff Smith. All were in attendance, along with others. But there are the optometrists as well: Darryl Workman and Karen McPherson. I've spoken with their offices. They're outraged, and the physiotherapists as well.

The point is that I feel that Elizabeth Witmer and the caucus on this side, the opposition side, have tried to bring some reason and balance, to give voice to the people who are outraged in the province of Ontario. I'll tell you that it's not just the 9% number. The people of Ontario are on to you. Your privatizing and delisting has been found out.

I know there's still hope on the other side. When I look at Jim Brownell from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, he isn't happy. Phil McNeely calls it brutal. Kim Craitor, who is not even here today, demands they restore the coverage. Dave Levac, the whip, told chiropractors he felt their pain, but he's not doing anything about it. Marie Bountrogianni, a minister, knows that she wants the premiums lowered.

You're on the wrong track. I have letters and petitions from all over the province. These are real people. You're affecting the quality of their life. This is from Tracy Allen. She says, "Many health problems can be helped and avoided with regular chiropractic care, thus reducing more expensive medical expense costs."

I can say to you as well that on this side of the House Cam Jackson has been arguing with George Smitherman, the Minister of Health, to relist Zometa, which is a cancer drug, to save the lives of people and improve their quality of life. George Smitherman refuses to listen.

It's obvious from listening to the comments today, on opposition day, that you're not listening to the people of Ontario. I'm disappointed that, even when I look further along, they won't have a referendum. They won't listen to the people of Ontario. What choice do the people of Ontario—you're destroying the very root, the trust they have in people in public office.

I ask Jim Brownell and Phil McNeely to do the right thing. Stand up for your people, or at least leave the chamber. Don't vote. You know it's wrong. You've said it's wrong. It's in the media; it's recorded. If you betray your own feelings because you're being whipped, the press release will go out tomorrow and your names will be on it, because you should listen to the people who vote you into office. Support this motion. It's the right thing to do. The people of Ontario want you to stand up for them, and it sounds to me like the Liberals won't.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time available for this opposition day motion.

Mrs Witmer has moved opposition day motion number 3.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1745 to 1755.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Bisson, Gilles	Martel, Shelley	Wilson, Jim
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dunlop, Garfield	Murdoch, Bill	Yakabuski, John
Eves, Ernie	O'Toole, John	
Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Jeffrey, Linda	Patten, Richard
Bartolucci, Rick	Kular, Kuldip	Peters, Steve
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Peterson, Tim
Bountrogianni, Marie	Leal, Jeff	Phillips, Gerry
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Pupatello, Sandra
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Qaadri, Shafiq
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Racco, Mario G.
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Ruprecht, Tony
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Sandals, Liz
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	Smith, Monique
Duncan, Dwight	Meilleur, Madeleine	Smitherman, George
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milloy, John	Sorbara, Greg
Fonseca, Peter	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Gravelle, Michael	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Hoy, Pat	Parsons, Ernie	Wynne, Kathleen O.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 19; the nays are 45.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until later on tonight at 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1758.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 8 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 8 juin 2004

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR RAISON MÉDICALE)

Mr Watson, on behalf of Mr Bentley, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, in respect of family medical leave and other matters / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour raison médicale et d'autres questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): Is there any debate on the bill?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Mr Speaker, I'll be sharing the remainder of my time with the members from Oakville, Huron-Bruce, Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and Thunder Bay-Superior North.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I am pleased to take part in third reading of the proposed Employment Standards Amendment Act (Family Medical Leave), 2004, Bill 56. It's my pleasure today, as the minister has said, that I'll be joined by and sharing my time with the members from Huron-Bruce, Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and Thunder Bay-Superior North.

This bill, if passed, would represent a profound and very important change in the support we are able to give employees in this province as a government. It would bring our province of Ontario in line with a similar new way of thinking that is now becoming the norm across Canada, and that is saying that governments should be supporting workers as they face the end of a loved one's life, not just those welcoming a new loved one into their life. This bill, if passed, would do that.

For some time now, we have recognized the needs of workers who bring a child into this world and we have adopted legislation that allows for that. We have supported them with pregnancy and parental leave so that they can focus on the hard work of raising a baby and still be able to return to their jobs after that period. Pregnancy and parental leave protections in the Employment Standards Act have helped thousands of new parents, including myself, meet their commitment to their new family and return to work, better able to focus on their job, knowing that their new family has been established and that life can continue as normal.

But what do we do about workers with a family member who is facing the other end of life, and that is the end of life? For anyone who has taken care of a dying loved one or is taking care of a dying loved one, there is an emotional burden that simply must be borne at that time. It's a responsibility we cannot shrink from. Taking care of a seriously ill loved one puts immense strains on anyone who is faced with it. The emotional strain is obvious to all, and it can create significant worries about long-term finances of caregivers if their jobs are threatened.

At that time of life, I think most, if not all, of us in this House would prefer that the person who is looking after the loved one have the needs of the loved one over and above all other thoughts, such as wondering if the rent is going to get paid and if their job will still be there when they get back.

Many workers in this position are forced to choose between either caring for a dying loved one or keeping their job. This government does not believe anyone should be forced to make this impossible choice. If this bill is passed, that choice will not have to be made. This bill would provide some relief by allowing workers to take time off their job, up to eight weeks, without having to worry about losing that job. Although the Ontario leave is unpaid, many will also be able to access the federal government's compassionate care benefit under the employment insurance program that currently exists, providing them with some income during this period as well.

1850

Some have argued that this bill does not go far enough to support workers in this position. Some have argued that tax cuts may provide a better benefit. The facts, however, simply don't support those assumptions.

According to a recent study of cancer patients, more than 40%—think of that: 40%—of family members of patients surveyed had to quit work to care for them. Twenty five per cent lost most or all of their savings during that period. About one in four working Canadians experienced high levels of caregiver strain, due in no small part to the difficulties of trying to balance their work life with the demands of caring for a seriously ill loved one.

Tax relief would simply provide no immediate relief to workers when they actually need it. Tax relief is of no

use to individuals if you don't have a job. It doesn't help if you have to live off your savings and worry about how you're going to live, while at the same you have to deal with the death of a family member.

Then there are the practical matters that we all know of in dealing with a dying person. Is it the right medication for the person? Is a person getting the right medication at the right time? When did they eat last? These are simple things that we have to do when we are caring for a dying person, to ensure that they live their last days in some dignity. The day-to-day detail of providing care can be overwhelming to anybody at that period in their life.

Now you try and head off to work and you try and do a good job. You try to keep your mind on the job. But your mind is really back home with the loved one who is in a bedroom or is in a hospital. Your mind should be on your job, or you shouldn't be there. It puts you in an unsafe position. That's not what we want for the dying person, that's not what we want for the caregiver and that's not what we want for the caregiver's employer either.

Family medical leave would, if passed by this Legislature, give employees providing care and support for a dying family member a window of relief that will help them focus on what's most important. After the death has taken place, they would be able to return to work with less emotional stress and much better able to focus on their job. This would provide the immediate help that a worker in this position needs. It would also provide a benefit to the dying family member.

This same study also showed that 36% of dying patients had to be admitted to hospital, not because they wanted to be there, not out of any medical necessity, but because their family simply could no longer provide the care they needed at home. I've heard of circumstances in my own riding where people have reached the point where they simply cannot care for the terminally ill person, and they put a call into 911. It's not really an emergency. It's not really what 911 is there for, but these people know that if they call, the ambulance will come and the loved one will be taken to the hospital and looked after.

This government believes that people have the right to die with dignity and, if they so choose, in their own home. You shouldn't be playing games at this time. I think we should be dealing with people up front and honestly. For many people, this means being able to remain in their own home as long as they possibly can, with the support of the people they love, rather than in the institutional environment of a hospital or a long-term-care facility.

We all know the stresses that our health care system is facing today. Some of those stresses and financial costs are the results of an aging population. Being able to stay at home reduces the strain on an already overburdened health care system, but providing dying people with the quality of care they deserve is a good enough reason. I'm sure most of my colleagues in this House would agree.

Our doctors, nurses and other health care providers in Ontario provide a standard of care in this province for dying patients that is second to none, but even they will tell you that there is simply nothing that can substitute for the care provided by family members. If this bill is passed, patients who are nearing the end of their lives would be able to do so with better support from loved ones. Many may be able to stay in their homes just that little bit longer. This can make all the difference in the world for someone who is facing their final days, being able to spend as much time as they possibly can with loved ones and in a familiar environment.

The facts I've already mentioned, I think, are reason enough to support this bill, but the benefits to employers must also be taken into consideration, as this certainly will impact them. We have found out that employees under high levels of stress tend to miss more work, they tend to be far less focused on their jobs, be much less productive, and it can also damage workplace morale and the productivity of the entire workplace. Employees with high caregiver strain are 13 times more likely to miss three or more days of work in a six-month period and are almost twice as likely to miss work because they are emotionally, physically or mentally fatigued. If you're an employer, you don't want employees at work whose minds are not on the job. You don't want employees at work who are under stress. You don't want employees who are thinking about a loved one. As I said earlier, that loved one may be in an institution, may be in a hospital, but that person's thoughts are with them when that person could be operating dangerous machinery; they could be driving a vehicle; they could be handling dangerous goods. If their minds are not able to be on the job, you as an employer simply do not want them there at that point in time.

Employers also stand to benefit from this bill. In today's work environment, it is becoming increasingly difficult for many workers to find a good balance between their work lives and their personal lives. This has a direct impact on the bottom line of business. The direct costs of absenteeism in Canadian workplaces due to high work-life conflict are estimated at between $3 billion and $5 billion per year. Indirect costs are estimated to add, perhaps, an additional $5 billion to those costs. Caregiver strain is a significant contributor to the costs I've just mentioned. The direct costs of absenteeism due to high caregiver strain to Canadian business is estimated to be upwards of $1 billion per year, with an additional $2 billion per year in indirect costs as well.

While family medical leave may have an immediate cost to some employers by having to make some arrangements for employees away on leave—and we as a government understand that that would have to be done—the employer would not have to pay that employee for the period that they would be on leave. So it isn't like you'd be paying somebody twice. The person who is leaving to go on the leave would go on to the EI system for a replacement of some of their income while the new person who is taking their place on a temporary basis would be paid by the employer. However, this cost—and there is a cost, obviously—would be comparatively min-

or, and the disruption it would cause is less than what is currently being incurred through employee stress, absenteeism, loss of productivity and eroded loyalty.

These costs are considerable. Employees with high caregiver responsibilities, as I said, are six times more likely to experience stress at work. That leads to reduced productivity and it leads to disruptions in the workplace. As I mentioned earlier, they are 13 times more likely to miss three or more days of work in a six-month period. Your attendance becomes unreliable at that point in your life. Your mind is elsewhere. Your responsibilities are elsewhere. Your employer cannot count on you showing up. It's best that you be with your loved one. They're twice as likely to miss three or more days of work in a six-month period. That's not due only to the stress of having to care for a loved one; that's due to the fatigue that's involved with caring for a loved one, putting in eight or 10 hours a day at work, going home and caring for a loved one. You know that a 24-hour clock has no meaning to somebody who is in their last days. They're more than twice as likely to consider leaving their jobs, quitting their jobs entirely, taking with them all the knowledge, all the experience and all the skill that they've been able to build up during their period of employment with the employer.

1900

Absenteeism due to caregiver strain results in direct costs to Canadian businesses of over $1 billion. As I said earlier, if you add the indirect costs, it can go as high as $3 billion. These costs are huge, but they're avoidable if we act responsibly as a society and recognize that we need to take care of the people who must take care of a dying member. It's a contract we make with ourselves. It's a contract that says, when you're facing the last days with a loved one, "I will look after you. When I'm facing those same days, I would like you to look after me." In its simplest form, that's what this bill does. Family medical leave is the responsible thing to do. It would allow for unpaid absences, letting workers deal with a personal crisis on their own time, without disrupting the workplace and affecting productivity. It allows workers to come back to work when they are better able to focus on their job, with less stress and in better health. It would mean many employees would not be forced to quit their job in order to care for a dying family member—and that causes even more disruption and cost to employers.

The impact of this is often taken for granted, but it can affect businesses very significantly. So we see that family medical leave makes sense for all workplace parties and for our entire society as a whole. Family medical leave would give employees the support they need, when they need it, ensure they still have a job to come back to, and an income that supports them during that period. It would help people to keep their job, protect their future earnings and savings, and help patients who are dying to remain in their homes for as long as possible, making them happier, with better peace of mind. One of our main priorities as a government is to promote healthier Ontarians in a healthier Ontario. We believe that our people's health is our most precious resource. We all share a responsibility to protect it from harm and to care for it in times of need. Family medical leave would help us do this. It's the right thing to do. It would provide change that works for the people of Ontario.

We believe that a government should be there for people not just at the beginning of life but when life is drawing to a close as well. That is what government should do. Choosing between a job and caring for a dying family member is not a choice a caring society should ask its people to make. This government is not prepared to ask people to make that choice. With the support of members of this House for this bill, we will make that possible.

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I rise this evening in support of Bill 56. This bill is another step forward and will make Ontario a province where human values and compassion are recognized as part of our character. There is nothing more stressful for a family than having one of its members facing death. Every minute, every second away from the person who is dying is agony, and each of us wishes to give comfort and support for our loved ones. Time becomes even more precious when one knows that the sands of the hourglass are running out. There is no need to list the stresses which living in the 21st century place upon all of us. There never seems to be enough time for what we must do to earn a living and to take part in our family.

Even in our rural parts of Ontario the pastoral life is part of a memory. The demands of farming, keeping a job off the farm and dealing with the variances of weather, as well as helping with the family, all add to our stress. Our many farmers and business people pursue their livelihood as independent owners. The vein of independence runs very deep, and this remains as we age. Our parents, our older citizens, wish to remain independent but there is a time, unfortunately, when independence must be surrendered to dependence. This is when the family must draw together and this is the time when a family member must be able to focus the time and efforts on the suffering and their loved one. When we add the stress of earning a living, plus all the physical and emotional demands of caring for another, the situation can certainly become intolerable.

There are a few occasions in government when we can make a difference in individual lives. Often we can deal with the big picture and forget the personal sagas that are going on in our ridings. But this bill will make a difference.

I spoke earlier about the generation in the middle. These are the people who have their own families and care for their parents. These are the people who are driving their children to school, to soccer games, to hockey games, and the ones who check up on their parents and take care of the details of their lives. As we all know, in most families both partners work now. When the prospect of a long-term illness faces the caregiver, there is much more stress heaped on. Bill 56 creates an avenue of relief. The person can leave their job knowing that it will be there when they return.

The lives of these people and their sacrifices are rarely noted. It is not dramatic and is little noticed except by those who are receiving them. The rare statistics tell the story. More than 80% of Canadians would prefer to spend their last days at home. This shows that that situation will not change. Most Canadians who had to take time off work to provide care or assistance did so for six weeks or less. More than 40% of employees caring for a seriously ill family member had to quit their job. Bill 56 will resolve this.

I am so pleased to speak on the third reading of Bill 56, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, in relation to family medical leave. As has been stated in past readings, this bill is about allowing compassionate people of Ontario the ability to look after their loved ones.

I would like to talk about the impact on Ontario employers. Employers who have an employee who is off work and utilizing the federal EI benefits for a family medical leave may incur costs due to staffing coverage. However, an employer providing a job-protected leave will save the expense of having to hire and train a new person if the employee were to quit the position to care for a seriously ill family member because leave was not provided.

My riding consists of many small businesses and entrepreneurs. Having employees who are able to focus on their jobs will make far more productive employees for the employer. But job loyalty and maintaining a productive workforce are certainly something that all employers hope will result from this important bill. But these are qualities that employers need and want in their employees.

By the passing of this bill, employees and employers will succeed. The government has designed the program so that family members can share the eight weeks' leave so as to not cause hardship for the employer. Employees would not be required to have worked a specified length of time in order to qualify for the leave. Anyone covered under the Employment Standards Act, 2000, is eligible for job-protected leave, including part-time workers.

1910

I would also like to share with you the cost of not implementing the family medical leave. Family caregiving has a direct impact on our workplaces. Employees experiencing high caregiver stress are more likely to miss work because of caregiving responsibilities or because they are emotionally, physically or mentally fatigued. Employees who are under stress because they must provide for a dying relative are often distracted and less productive.

The direct cost of absenteeism due to high levels of caregiver stress has been estimated at just over $1 billion a year in Canada, with additional indirect costs of $1 billion to $2 billion. These costs could be alleviated if an employer could plan for a period of absence and staff accordingly. More than 40% of employees caring for a seriously ill family member have had to quit work. Close to one third of employees lost a major source of income, while another 25% lost most or all of their savings.

I wish to speak about the impact that Bill 56 will have on our rural communities. Elderly citizens make up a very large part of my riding. It is an age where they are very much used to their independence, the style of lifestyle that they have had, certainly the farming and the entrepreneurial spirit. This will allow their family to maintain their independence as long as possible. It's a characteristic of our rural life.

Most people, when they're given a choice, choose to remain in their home as long as possible with the support of the people they love, rather than an institutional environment of a hospital or a long-term-care facility. Unfortunately, this choice is not always available. A recent study showed that 36% of dying patients had to be admitted to hospital, not because of medical necessity but because their family could not provide the care that they needed at home. Bill 56 will make it possible for them to receive help from their own family members.

In Ontario, we have a generation who are parents and who are also in a position to take care of their parents. This generation in the middle is under great stress. In my riding, we see families where both members, as I said, are working plus raising a family. When we add the distance which people must drive in rural areas to get to their jobs, we realize that time is very much in short supply.

In rural areas we tend to stay for many generations. People taking care of their parents is certainly a very common theme. The eight-week leave will reduce that pressure. It will create stability, which is necessary at a very emotional time.

The employer will benefit when the employee will not be torn between balancing the numerous roles that are placed upon us in this society. It will provide the employer a very clear-cut option and will allow the staffing needs to be met over a very much longer term.

Taking care of our parents and loved ones is a quality which we value in our society. We, as the people who represent our constituents, should and will rise to the challenge. By introducing this bill, our government is making real, positive change. I know that for my fellow members—as the member for Oakville has said—this is something that we willingly and gladly endorse.

We know that by giving the proper tools, we will empower the people of Ontario to meet the needs of their families. What more could we give our families than our most precious resource, which seems to be our time? If we can allow our families to have the dignity to remain in their home in their greatest time of need, I do not believe that we can give of ourselves in any better way than we can to our families, who have given so much to us to get us to the stages where all of us have the ability to help out within our families.

It is my pleasure to rise this evening to support Bill 56, which I believe is a very important piece of legislation to allow the people of Ontario the ability to give of themselves in times when their families need them the most.

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I'm happy to join my colleagues in the third reading of Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family medical leave and other matters. I'm honoured to be speaking on this bill because I believe it is a truly Canadian bill.

Bill 56 will provide eight weeks of unpaid leave from work for those who are taking care of a terminally ill family member at risk of dying within 26 weeks. Our government is providing this medical leave if this bill passes, because this bill gives them leave and it's the right thing to do. Family medical leave is a sign of a compassionate society, a compassionate government and compassionate employers.

One of the dreadful choices many of our citizens are facing is choosing between their jobs and caring for a dying family member. It's not a choice a compassionate society asks people to make. When they have to make this choice, it causes stress and anxiety, affecting their health at a time when they need their strength to care for a dying family member, for a dying loved one.

I say that I support this bill for one simple reason. Although it's a simple and understated reason, the point needs to be made that any society that encourages and fosters compassion in its citizens will always be better for it.

Some members of the opposition party mentioned during the second reading of this bill that this bill is condescending to our business community and is legislating a sensitivity that already exists throughout the province. I know many people in our business community share those sentiments, but in a time of grave family illness and personal crisis, does it not make sense that we provide an immediate remedy? That's what our government is doing at this time. It's providing an immediate remedy for people who have to look after a family member who is in the last stages of dying.

On April 21 of this year, the member for Whitby-Ajax as much as said that this is a very minor bill. He said, "I'm speaking about the relatively minor legislation that has been brought into this House, compared to the major issues that we are facing, and are looking for that major reform from the Ministry of Labour. Goodness knows, we need continued labour reforms. We need jobs. We lost 25,000 jobs last month. My goodness. It's shocking."

1920

He continued on to say, and I beg your indulgence because I do have a point, "I look forward to the kind of economic initiatives coming forward from the government that will make a bill like this seem not as important, because we'll be looking at the bigger issues: We'll be looking at innovation in the province. We'll be looking at skills training. We'll be looking at balancing budgets. We'll be looking at paying off public debt. We'll be looking at those fundamentals that the Liberal candidates and the now Liberal Premier talked about during the course of the general election only six or seven months ago, but about which we have not seen legislation in this place.

"I'd like to hear that they're working on it and that we're going to see this kind of important step forward, but I haven't even heard that."

The member from Whitby-Ajax unfortunately only sees the single tree, not the entire forest. What bigger issue is there than the emotional well-being of the people of this province? I would like to say that that member will benefit from the knowledge that there were 31,000 jobs created in the past month. So now, hopefully, we can get back to the legislation at this time. I'm quite honoured to speak on the third reading of Bill 56.

This bill is a fundamental part of this government's determination and desire to provide the best level of care to those who are near death and dying, and to allow for their families to take the necessary time off work without worrying about their job security. This is a simple, straightforward and holistic approach to ensuring that employees who must take a leave of absence from work to care for a gravely ill family member have the assurance of their own government that their job will be there for them following the palliative process—and the employer who doesn't want to lose the economic benefits provided by a skilled worker. That's what this government has committed itself to, and I will get into the specific commitments later on.

Going back to the care, about 30% of Canadian adults are now responsible for the care of an old relative in their homes and 80% of Canadians would prefer to spend their last few days at home, not in a hospital or in an institution. Yet only 25% of those who are in the last stages of their life are able to do it.

The same day, on April 21, when the member from Whitby-Ajax commented on the bigger issue that our government should focus on, his caucus mate from Kitchener-Waterloo commented that, "The bill neglects to take into account the serious emotional, physical and financial burdens one bears when an individual decides to take care of a terminally ill family member. Where are the resources that will allow family members to care for them? Where is the additional money for home care, long-term care? What is the government's plan of action to assist caregivers in these types of situations where they choose to take time off to help their family? These are questions that need answers, and they need answers now."

The answers both members seek are these: Our government, the McGuinty government, through many of our ministers, and specifically our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, has committed this government to a complete reversal of previous governments' attitude to the people of this province, and this bill is such an example.

This specific piece of legislation works with the federal legislation, the Employment Insurance Act, and will exist to protect what I believe is a sincere and beautiful right of people to care for a loved one who is near death. No employer will be exempt from this legislation. No employee will be fired during the period they are away from work.

This legislation is balanced and, along with our government's commitment to further fund home care and long-term care in this province, will allow people to die with the dignity they deserve in a setting where their loved ones and caregivers can make the best remaining use of their time given.

If we look at the NDP government's record, in 1990 the NDP government campaigned on a promise to rebalance labour relations. Instead, the NDP introduced the social contract, which was the largest single violation of workers' rights in Ontario history. Now they talk about broken promises. They broke those promises the last time they were in government. In 1993, the NDP tore up the contracts of 900,000 unionized workers, including doctors, civil servants, teachers and nurses in Ontario.

The previous government legislated 60 hours of work in Ontario. The previous government made overtime payable after 44 hours only. This is averaged over a period of four weeks.

Going back to the NDP record, the NDP in 1990 promised to raise the minimum wage to $7.20 an hour, and they for sure broke that promise.

Only the Liberals raised the minimum wage within a few months of taking over as a government, and we will continue to raise it over the next four years.

The previous government, the Tory government, refused to raise the minimum wage 1% throughout their entire mandate of eight years.

Interjection: They didn't give a nickel to anybody.

Mr Kular: They never gave anything to any worker. We kept our promise. As a Liberal government, we have raised the minimum wage by 30 cents already, and we will continue to do so each year until 2008.

If that bill is passed—

Interjection.

Mr Kular: The honourable member says we have introduced a bill to have the next election on October 4, 2007. That's the bill we have introduced; that's the promise we are going to keep.

In summary, this government is bringing real, positive change by providing family medical leave for families who need to care for their loved ones who are in the terminal stages of their lives, without the fear of job loss. This bill will help protect their jobs. This is the kind of change the people of Ontario are looking for in this province.

As I have a look at this bill during third reading, I fully support this bill. As our minister has recommended, this is the bill which will have six weeks of leave for family members to look after members of their family who are in the last stages of their life. They want to spend the few days of their life with their family members. I fully support this bill.

1930

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): I'm very pleased and honoured to be able to join third reading debate on Bill 56. I'm very proud to say that I—like, I hope, everyone in this Legislature—will be supporting it. I think this is a piece of legislation that falls in line with some very positive measures that our Minister of Labour has brought forward in the past few months.

We are very pleased about the minimum wage being increased this year, and continuing to be increased, something that I think has been long in coming. We are delighted about that. The fact that the minister is moving to eliminate the 60-hour workweek—another measure that we believe needs to happen. I know that the minister is also going to be engaging in a consultation process related to the elimination of mandatory retirement, an issue that perhaps has more sensitivity related to it, but one that I certainly endorse. I look forward to being part of that consultation process as well.

I must say that I think this particular piece of legislation is one that all of us in the Legislature should be very pleased to support. When one is dealing with the end of life of a loved one, it is something that clearly becomes very difficult in every possible way. What unquestionably adds to that stress is if you are in a position where you are working and you are not able to have any protection in terms of retaining your job, no protection in terms of being able to leave your workplace. I think many of us in this Legislature would probably have some stories to tell of a situation they were in where they needed to find the time and found the time—because one will always find the time for their family—but at some risk to themselves and at some level of anxiety.

I'm very proud to be part of a government that is moving forward on this, and I'm very proud to be part of third reading debate. The fact is, the government is introducing this bill because we are making real, positive change by providing job-protected family medical leave for families who need to care for a gravely ill family member, without fear of that job loss. The people of Ontario, their drive, their intelligence and their resourcefulness—that's what we offer the world. We will only ensure the prosperity and well-being of our province if we are also able to see to the well-being of our people.

One of the dreadful choices facing many of our citizens is choosing between their jobs and caring for a dying family member. This is not a choice a compassionate society asks people to make. The choice people have been facing has caused a great deal of stress and anxiety, affecting their health at a time when they need their strength to care for a dying loved one.

As a society, we believe that it is important to support our citizens at critical times in their lives. We certainly believe in supporting people at the beginning of life, and we show this support through pregnancy and parental leave. This is a responsibility that we, as a society, have accepted as a shared responsibility.

Similarly, we believe that it is also important to be there for families at the end of a life. People should simply not be forced to make the impossible choice between keeping their job or caring for a dying loved one. We owe it to families to support them in their time of need. That's what this piece of legislation, Bill 56, is all about.

The bill specifically allows employees to take up to eight weeks of unpaid leave, time off from work, to care for a dying family member. It also allows them to be eligible for another eight weeks of job-protected leave if the family member is still gravely ill at the end of the 26-week period. That's part of the legislation. Their jobs would be protected while they're on this leave, allowing them to take time off without worrying about being able to keep their job. I don't think there's any question that this is a huge issue for those people who are left in that position. As I say, I think there are people in this Legislature who have been in that position. I still have my mother alive and quite well, I'm pleased to say, but I find that as I age I want to be able to spend more time with her. Obviously, if the situation demanded it, I would want to be able to look after her.

There are real benefits to employees. This legislation would, if passed, provide a time for working people to stop so that they may deal with the immediate consuming priority: seeing that their spouse, their mother or their father, their son or daughter, sadly enough, if that was the case, gets the best possible care in their final days.

The question we have to ask is, how much attention will someone who is worrying about a dying relative be able to give to their job? In a more specific way, if they're dealing with machinery, might they indeed pose a safety hazard?

Employees who take job-protected family medical leave will tend to return to their workplaces better able to focus on their jobs. Knowing they do not have that stress of worrying about whether they'll be able to retain their job will have a huge impact, I believe, on whether they can happily return. Employees who have been given the opportunity to take time off and then return to their job will return, I believe it's fair to say, with a renewed sense of commitment, with the energy and focus required to perform the work.

The truth is that many people, up to now, have had to quit their jobs to have the time and energy to care for a loved one. This burdens them and their family with financial worries at a time, obviously, of very heightened anxiety. Many of them are forced to spend much or all of their savings because they have lost their main source of income. This is simply not right and it is simply not fair. Again, this is why we're bringing this legislation forward.

There are benefits to employers as well; there's no question about that. Providing family medical leave is a shared responsibility, not one we ask one segment of society to shoulder. Thus, we don't ask employers to pay for the cost of providing family medical leave unless of course it is an item negotiated between the employer and the employee. The fact is that job-protected family medical leave benefits the employer and it benefits society at large.

For employers it clearly provides a benefit by creating a more positive, loyal and productive workforce. Studies that have been out there have shown that about one in four working Canadians experiences high levels of caregiver strain, much of this coming from the difficulties of balancing their work life with the demands of caring for a seriously ill loved one.

Again, that is probably increasing for those of us who are baby boomers now moving on into another stage of our lives with elderly parents. But there are other circumstances as well where this is a very important issue.

This is a strain that's certainly not beneficial to employees—I don't think anybody would argue that—nor is it beneficial to employers. A recent study of cancer patients showed that more than 40% of family members of patients surveyed had to quit work to care for them. That's not right. Obviously in a situation such as that, when people are so ill with a disease like cancer that, sadly, now continues to affect so many families, to be in a position where you need to make that choice simply is wrong. Again, that's why I'm proud of our government for bringing this legislation forward, and I'm proud to stand here in my place and support it.

The statistics are interesting, and one almost hates to talk about statistics, although I think they're useful in terms of making the case that indeed this is legislation that is necessary that we bring forward, and bring forward now.

Employees with high caregiver strain are 13 times more likely to miss three or more days of work in a six-month period—

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): That's important.

Mr Gravelle: It is important—and almost twice as likely to miss work because they were emotionally, physically or mentally fatigued. That certainly is significant, and it's one that we need to understand needs to change. So this is not beneficial to employees, nor is it beneficial to employers.

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The fact is, death is an event we will all face. When that time comes, the question comes out to, where would you want to be? Most people, given a choice, would choose to remain in their home as long as possible rather than in an institutional environment of a hospital or a long-term-care facility, but they can only do that, most often, with the support of the people they love. Again, I think this legislation will mean that that is far more likely to be able to happen if you're able to have a family member know that they can have, in this case, eight weeks of job-protected unpaid leave, and if they know they can get another eight weeks of leave if indeed it's needed. I think that just absolutely increases the likelihood that you will be in a position to care for and protect a loved one in their last days.

The fact is, though, this choice is not always available. Another recent study showed that 36% of dying patients had to be admitted to hospital, not because of medical necessity but because their family could not provide the care they needed at home. I don't think it's very difficult for any of us to understand that. There are so many pressures in life, and certainly we accept as commonplace the fact that there are double earners in families. It's very

difficult with the situation we face in terms of our jobs, the stresses that are involved in trying to maintain your home and everything else. That does not allow many people the flexibility to be able to do that. This leave, which will protect your job for a significant period of time, will make a significant difference. It doesn't go all the way. It probably doesn't go as far as we want it to go, but it will make a significant difference, and it's a reason why, obviously, we're pleased to be here.

But the question really comes down to, do we really want to say to Ontarians facing death, "We will not ensure that someone will be there for you?" Do we really want to say to a dying child that their mother or father can't be with them, that they have more important things to do? I will acknowledge, as I think probably people that are watching us and those of us in the room would say, that a parent would be there under any circumstances, that a parent is going to be there, and in many cases, a child will be there for a parent who is passing away, especially in that situation. But what we're saying is that we should not leave people in a position where they're forced to make that choice and say, "I may lose my job out of this. I have no security out of this, because obviously I'm going to be with my dying loved one. I'm going to be there." And we would be there. So I think that's an extraordinarily important point to make. The fact is, people have been there; people have lost their jobs. We're now bringing forward legislation that will mean that that will not have to happen again—at least, not in those circumstances.

What possibly could be more important than taking care of your son or daughter when they are dying? I don't think there's anything by which that can be measured. There's nothing else you can measure that by.

Looking at the benefits to society—and I suppose these are things that we need to do—estimates put the direct costs of absenteeism in Canadian workplaces due to high work-life conflict at between $3 billion and $5 billion per year. One hates to put it in dollar figures; it always seems somewhat crass when we're discussing issues of seriousness. But I think it's important to at least note that. The reason is, again, because people are not in a position to make that easy choice, so what they do is choose to be with their loved ones and have their absenteeism from work, and that causes other related stress problems.

There are other costs as well. Our health care system is facing stresses. We talk about that every single day in this Legislature. Regardless of which side of the House we're on or whether we agree or disagree on a number of issues, we recognize that our health care system continues to face crisis and will continue to do so, and financial costs that result in, quite frankly—ultimately, we want to provide increasing care for our aging population.

Other studies have shown that 90% of the health care that an individual uses comes in the last nine days of life. These are the costs when dying takes place in a health care facility. So obviously, if we're able to help, even in some way, allow for a situation where a family member can be with a loved one, whether it's a son, a daughter or a parent, and possibly they can be in an environment that is not going to be an institution, this is obviously going to be a tremendous benefit. And may I say with some apology, it will also save the system some money. I suppose those are things that just can't be ignored.

But it also has to be said that it is not only the cost in dollar terms that should concern us and indeed does concern us. Ontario is a society that is caring and compassionate. I don't think many of us would argue about that. People do prefer to be at their home, I think, for their last days. I don't think there's any question about it. I can recall my own father, who passed away five years ago. All he wanted was to come home. He just wanted to come home, and we wanted so much to bring him home. He wasn't able to do that but I know what it would have meant to him. I know of other circumstances, which, out of sensitivity, I probably shouldn't be talking about, situations where people were able to come home. The fact is, it makes an enormous difference in people's lives.

Again, no piece of legislation is ever the perfect piece of legislation in terms of giving everything you want and everything you need, but this is a piece of legislation that does allow that to now happen, far more often and far more easily.

People do prefer to be at home, they want to be at home, and their family members want them to be at home and they want to be with them. Certainly this legislation would allow that. Perhaps more specifically, this legislation would define the kind of society we have in Ontario. It will define the kind of people we choose to be.

It is with some pride that I ask all members of the House to support this legislation, Bill 56, something that I think we all should be supporting.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to be able to rise tonight on the leadoff speeches on third reading of Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, in respect of family medical leave and other matters.

As time goes on, we think of questions to ask that maybe should be put on the record. There are a couple of things I'd like to ask tonight. I'm not sure what the answers will be or if someone can answer them in some of the responses tonight or in some of the other speeches from the government.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Are you going to ask it of the minister?

Mr Dunlop: Yes, I would like to have had the minister available to talk.

There are a couple of things. If and when this bill is passed, when will it be proclaimed and when will residents of the province actually be able to take advantage of this legislation? So the question is on a proclamation date and an implementation date. That's my first question.

The second question I'd like the government members to answer, if they possibly could, is in section 49.1 under "Family medical leave." It says, "An employee is entitled

to a leave of absence without pay of up to eight weeks to provide care or support to an individual described in subsection (3) if a qualified health practitioner issues a certificate," and it goes up to a period of 26 weeks. My understanding is, you'd have to have the certificate issued three times in a period of 26 weeks. If the practitioner says someone's going to pass on, and it's a 26-week period, and if they continue to live—and I hope they would be able to live—for a period of 26 weeks, they would have to reissue that certificate four times in that period. My question is, who's going to pay for the cost of that and who's going to absorb the administration of this?

Mr Kormos: I want folks to know that this isn't the rerun, because many times folks watch it. They come home from work and they click on the legislative channel to watch the rerun from the afternoon. This is not the rerun. It's 10 to 8 right now. As a matter of fact, I'm going to be speaking to this bill in around an hour and 10 minutes' time. So if Law and Order or CSI, whatever it is, isn't too compelling, I invite people to tune in. Just keep the clicker by your side and click back to where you are now. You can do that: Pick another channel and just do the "return" button. That automatically takes you to the last channel. If people want to do that, that's fine too.

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One of the sad things, one of the regrettable things, is that this brand new Minister of Labour—and I think this is the first bill of his that has made it to third reading. I was really looking forward to him doing the leadoff on third reading. I really was. He could be ill. He could perhaps not be feeling well; I've got a little bit of a cold myself. He could be down at the casino in Niagara for the ribbon cutting. He could be in the members' lounge back behind there. I just wanted him to know I was disappointed that he wasn't here to do the leadoff.

Go ahead, Speaker. You're going to admonish me for something.

The Acting Speaker: I ask the member not to refer to the absence of any other member of the House.

Mr Kormos: Thank you, Speaker. I told you you were going to admonish me. It's like I could read minds, almost, isn't it? It's remarkable.

I really was disappointed. I'm worried about the minister. Perhaps something happened to him on the way here. We should all be concerned. God forbid that he's fallen subject to anything—a flat tire or something like that. I really don't want that to happen.

The bill's fluff. The bill's going to pass. But be very careful, you Liberal backbenchers, about what you attribute to this bill. Be careful with the spin, the little Coles Notes, the cheat sheets that the Ministry of Labour is giving—one hour's time, please, Speaker.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to address the House on Bill 56. I want to thank the parliamentary assistant from Oakville and the members for Huron-Bruce, Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and Thunder Bay-Superior North for their wonderful comments.

I do not liken it to fluff. I do not liken this to any kind of namby-pamby comments about how people die in their homes, I would suggest to you very respectfully. And I am looking forward to the former minister from Kitchener-Waterloo's comments as well, because I do believe that each and every one of us does come to this place with our stories and our concerns that we want to make sure people are aware of.

In my riding, we have just launched a fundraiser for our hospice and our life care centre, which will be engaged in end-of-life care. I want to remind us here in this place that long ago in the history of our country and our province people used to be born in their homes and die in their homes, being cared for by and around loved ones. I think this is a model of history that we are trying to duplicate to make it easier for us. In these hurly-burly days and this age when we find little time to be with our families, this is a perfect example of non-fluff items that allow us to be with our family members during very critical times in our lives, and in particular at the end of life.

In terms of death, this particular bill is going to attempt to allow our family members to care for loved ones at a very serious time of life, to ensure that they are surrounded by love, by people who care, by those they have lived with all their lives, and have an opportunity to end their life with dignity and with the ones they love and the ones they want to be with. There's nothing fluffy about this, and I would recommend very strongly that we keep that in our hearts and our minds when we make our decisions to vote on this bill. I support it.

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one last question and comment. No? OK. One of the government members who spoke to the bill has two minutes to reply.

Mr Kular: I want to thank my colleagues the members from Oakville, Huron-Bruce and Thunder Bay-Superior North.

Mr Kormos: What about thanking the person who wrote your speech?

Mr Kular: I also want to thank the member from Niagara Centre for speaking on third reading of Bill 56.

All the members of this House who have spoken during the last hour have made sure that family members looking after terminally ill patients at home are getting medical leave for eight weeks with job protection and unpaid leave. I think everybody should appreciate this. From our government's point of view, it's a commitment our government has made to make a real, positive change for people who are terminally ill and their family members, so that the terminally ill patients can be looked after at home, and even in hospitals, by family members, because terminally ill patients would like to have some of their family members by their side during the last stages of their illness. It's a good gesture that our minister has shown by introducing this bill. If passed, this would be a good bill for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I will be sharing my time with the member from the Brockville area, the member for Leeds-Grenville.

Interjection: Senator Runciman.

Mrs Witmer: Yes, the to-be Senator Runciman; that's right, for sure.

I am pleased to participate in this debate on An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, in respect of family medical leave and other matters, commonly known as Bill 56. This bill, as has been talked about, is an amendment to the Employment Standards Act which will provide up to eight weeks of leave of absence without pay in order that individuals can provide care or support to specified family members.

The family member in question must be suffering from a very serious medical condition, and there is an expectation that the individual who is being cared for would be at "significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 weeks or such shorter period as may be prescribed." I guess that brings me to what I see as the first shortfall of this legislation, in that it does not apply to other caregivers who may also wish to spend time with family members during times of crisis; times of crisis which necessarily would not result in death, but obviously times when people are very, very seriously ill. I do believe that, in that respect, although this bill does provide a first step, it certainly does not fulfill the promise this government made to people in the province of Ontario to provide a family medical leave plan for families and individuals who are going through that very difficult period of time of providing for loved ones who are ill. I do see that as a very significant shortfall.

If you take a look at the legislation, there are certainly some amendments that should be made. There are probably some questions that should be answered, some flaws that should be addressed. There is a bit of a contradiction in this bill. We're saying that eight weeks is going to be allowed for this compassionate leave and yet the bill states that the death has to occur within 26 weeks. So there is going to be a need, obviously, for the individual who is the caregiver to continue to receive permission and get permission to continue to care for the patient. That is rather challenging in itself, because when someone is ill, you don't know whether they're going to pass away within a month or whether it's going to be longer. So the person who is looking for that leave still needs to try to find a way to make sure they can be with their loved one throughout the entire period of time. I think that is one of the shortcomings of this bill. I think that's something that needs to be addressed. How many times can they take this eight-week leave of absence? Or, at the end of the day, if the loved one who was thought to be near death lingers for more than 26 weeks, perhaps 30 or 40, does this mean that the individual in question who has taken the leave will eventually have to quit their job, or will they be able to get another extension on compassionate grounds? So there's a bit of a murky area here in the legislation, and there certainly are some things here that need some clarification.

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I think the other significant shortcoming is the fact that this bill does not appear to address the issue of family who may live out of the country or out of the province. I know people have asked me whether or not this would apply if they had a relative, family, a parent who might have been living in Europe or perhaps in the Far East, or whether this would apply to someone living in the United States or in another part of Canada.

So again, I think there needs to be some clarification, because I think it raises another challenge. It's one thing to require a doctor in the province of Ontario to provide a prognosis that allows family members to qualify for compassionate leave, but it's certainly quite another to ask a doctor in another province, perhaps in the United States, perhaps in an African country, a European country, a South American country or someone in Asia to provide that prognosis. Would that prognosis also qualify for compassionate leave?

Obviously, doctors outside of the province of Ontario may not be familiar with this program which the government is intending to put in place, and they may not have the requisite forms that may be required. I'm not sure if those forms are going to be provided by the Ministry of Health or by the Ministry of Labour. Certainly, this could also lead to some delays in caregivers being able to access this family leave program. So I hope the government has given serious consideration to making sure the appropriate paperwork and program information is available not just to physicians in the province of Ontario—because, as I say, we really do live in a global community and we have so many people living in the province who have come from elsewhere and have family members elsewhere. We just need to make sure they can provide and get this leave in order to be there at the side of their loved one who is dying. I think that's something that is going to raise some questions and maybe create some problems. You might ask, will it be enough to get the written word of a doctor in another country, in another part of the world?

Also, what about language or cultural barriers that might make it difficult for a doctor in another part of the world to provide the required prognosis that we would require here in the province of Ontario?

Also, in some countries, I understand, doctors do require payment for services, including letters or reports such as we're asking for here. Would the family member have to foot the bill for getting the appropriate forms filled out, or would our provincial OHIP provide the funding?

What happens in cases where there may be doubts about the accuracy of a prognosis from a physician outside the province of Ontario or even within the province? Will employers have the legal right to challenge the assessment, and will the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Labour have any ability to investigate in order to ensure that the report that is submitted on behalf of the individual who is ill is accurate?

Those are just a few of the questions that should be addressed in taking a look. I would certainly urge this government, and the minister in particular, to take a look at our system, a system which supposedly provides universal accessibility to health care services in the province of Ontario. However, we've certainly learned, as a result of the provincial budget, that this government doesn't believe in universal accessibility to health care services. Regrettably, in this most recent budget we have seen a delisting of eye care exams. We have seen a delisting of chiropractic services. We've seen a delisting of physiotherapy as well. For a province that once prided itself on being a leader in providing universally accessible services to all people in this province based on need and not the ability to pay, in the few weeks now since the budget we have actually moved to a health system where the size of your wallet or your pocketbook is going to determine the level of access to care that you have. This government is actually moving us toward two-tier health care. If you can pay for eye exams or pay for chiropractic services or physiotherapy, then you can move to the front of the line. So what we have is two-tier health and privatization.

I can tell you that this is certainly receiving a poor reception from people in Ontario. MPPs are being inundated with communication in the form of e-mails, faxes, phone calls and letters saying that we do not agree with the delisting of the health care services. We have always prided ourselves on living in a province that provided universal accessibility of health care services. You have now broken that promise. You're moving to two-tier and you're moving to privatization of our system.

I want to come back to some other concerns around the bill that we are debating this evening, Bill 56. I guess it concerns essential workers. We saw the strain that was put on our health system when so many of our nurses and our front-line health care workers were forced to stay home during the SARS crisis. We know that despite the efforts, we still could find ourselves in that type of situation at another time. We also know that we don't have enough doctors and nurses in this province, so again that could create a problem.

Our government did attempt to increase the number of doctors in the province of Ontario. We actually initiated funding to build the first medical school in a century in this province. We increased health care funding from $17.4 billion to $28 billion. We brought in legislation to provide for the creation of 12,000 more nursing positions and an increase in foreign-trained professionals. We brought in many incentives to encourage health professionals to relocate to underserviced areas. We introduced nurse practitioners—the first province in Canada to do so. I will tell you that the family networks were the first in Canada as well.

I'm pleased that the Liberals now are building on some of the initiatives that we have put in place, but the reality remains: We are still short of nurses and doctors and certainly other essential workers for our health care system. If you have a doctor's office and the one employee, perhaps a nurse, goes on compassionate leave, how is the government prepared to provide support to any small employer when someone makes that decision to go on compassionate leave?

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In essence, this legislation has not taken into consideration the impact on a small workplace where you have few employees. Again, we need to take a look at that. Is the government, for example, going to provide extra funding to staff health care facilities, hospitals, fire stations, police stations, jails, nuclear power facilities or other areas where you have essential workers?

I think the government needs to take a look at how this legislation could possibly impact those types of workplaces. Perhaps there's an obligation on the part of the government to help the employer deal with the consequences of an individual going on leave.

One of the other issues that I hope this government will take a look at: We know that many employers in Ontario already provide compassionate leave. Is the leave in this bill going to be in addition to the existing benefits? Will it replace the benefits? What if someone's existing benefits are better than the government's plan? Which of the programs will have priority? These are some questions that employers and employees obviously need answered. Unfortunately, that is the kind of clarity that is missing from Bill 56.

That brings me to the fifth point on my list: some of the technical questions that employers have about this proposed law. For example, what grounds would an employer have for refusing an application for compassionate leave? Obviously, if that were to happen, that would not ever be a decision that any employer would take lightly, but there may be a reason. There may be a legal issue that would need to be looked at.

When can an application be refused and when can it be appealed? Whom would it be appealed to? What grounds of appeal would be allowed? None of those technical questions are answered in this bill.

Another area left untouched by Bill 56 is the employment qualifications for this program. For example, how long must you be employed before you are eligible for compassionate leave? Can I start a job, work there for one week, and be eligible for compassionate leave? What about contract employees? What about people who are still on a probationary period at a new job? Again it goes back to the question, who is eligible?

How many times can you take this leave? How frequently can you take this leave? You may have a father and a mother and perhaps someone else who would qualify in short order and you may be the one who has been designated as the caregiver. I think these are some very fundamental questions that are left unanswered in the legislation. Obviously, the answers to these questions are required if we're going to be able to accurately calculate the costs of this program and if employers are going to put in place the appropriate human resource policies.

If this government is genuinely committed to the implementation of this bill, and if they want to ensure that

people are going to be in compliance with the law, they are going to have to be much more clear, provide much more clarification, and they're going to have to provide much more in the way of detailed explanations as to how Bill 56 will actually work.

It's one thing to say, "This is what we're going to do." As I say, it's a good first step. It doesn't go far enough, but I think we have to take a look at the actual implementation of the bill and how it will deal with both the employee and the employer in the workplace, as well as the doctor who's going to be required to provide the prognosis as to the state of health of the person in question and also be able to verify that the person is going to pass away within the time period allowed for in the bill.

My sixth and final point about this bill has to do with the provision of what I would call the support for families that this government promised in their preparation for the election. Really, this falls so far short of what was promised. It really does not provide the solution to the families who thought they would be given the opportunity to look after an individual who was seriously ill but not necessarily on the verge of death.

Bill 56 should have been the total commitment, part of the broader package the government had promised, because this bill does not take into consideration the human challenges that families face when they have children or other family members—parents—who are in need of care. I would have liked to have seen more support or funding to allow these people to be at home with their families.

I think there should have been some recognition that not all crises are immediate or short-term. There are families who live in this province who have seriously ill children, and they will have been coping with these children for years or perhaps a lifetime—children who are autistic, children who are severely disabled, children who are developmentally disabled. Bill 56 does not allow for those parents to take a leave of absence, and that's what's missing in this bill.

The government had the opportunity to reach out to all these families who are coping with the consequences of a serious illness or perhaps a very serious accident. Regrettably, the bill does not address this. This bill will not help all parents and others through the difficult times of serious illness. It is very limited as to who it applies to and whom it can support. So there are some very serious shortcomings.

I would just like to say that we actually did promise, in our 2003 budget, support for people with disabilities and support for family caregivers. We were prepared to provide them with improved tax support because we know there are many individuals in this province with disabilities and their caregivers who must cope with more costs than the general population. I'm sure we all have friends in that category. I certainly know parents who have had children with disabilities, and I know how much they have been required to personally pay in order to support that child.

Ontario's tax system already recognizes their reduced ability to pay taxes through several non-refundable tax credits for people with disabilities and individuals caring for disabled or infirm family members. However, we did propose, in our 2003 budget, three enhancements to the credits already in place, which would have taken effect January 1, 2003.

First, our budget proposed to increase the underlying amounts for the disability credit, the caregiver credit, the infirm dependant credit and disability credit supplement for children with severe disabilities to $6,637.

Second, our budget proposed to expand the caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit to include spouses or common-law partners who are dependent by reason of a mental or physical infirmity and to provide support to more caregivers living apart from dependent relatives. Third, our budget, which was 2003, proposed that both the caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit be reduced when the dependant's net income reaches $13,050 and eliminated at an income level of $19,687.

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Currently, this caregiver credit is eliminated when a dependant's income reaches $16,290, and the infirm dependant credit is reduced to zero for dependants with incomes of $8,922 or more. These budget initiatives, these improvements, put together, would have provided an estimated $50 million in benefits to about 165,000 Ontario taxpayers.

This legislation that we have in front of us, despite the fact that it allows individuals to take a leave of absence in the case of a family member who is approaching death, really does not allow for those with very little income to take a leave of absence, because there is no additional financial support to provide to any of these individuals.

So we have here a piece of legislation that has some very serious shortcomings. I don't think the bill is going to meet the objectives, even as it's written at the present time. As I said, these objectives fall far short of the original promise made by the McGuinty Liberal government. I would urge the government to take a very serious look at the flaws of the bill and I would encourage them to demonstrate compassion and work to do everything they possibly can to correct them. I know the public had very high expectations. These expectations have unfortunately not been met. So I would just encourage the government to move forward, to make some amendments and to live up to the promise they made to families and people in Ontario.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate surrounding Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act in respect of medical leave and other matters. I want to compliment my colleague Mrs Witmer, who as you know served as a Minister of Labour, in challenging the situation. In my view, in any event, she was one of the best Ministers of Labour this province has had, certainly in recent memory. It's good to have her participating here today and lending her expertise to this debate.

Some members of the public who view these proceedings—I'm not sure why they do, but apparently there is an audience. I hear from a variety of constituents on occasion who have been watching the proceedings and who comment on them. They may be wondering about this bill. There seems to be a level of support around the assembly for it, and I think it's fair to say that all parties are prepared to support this bill. But that's not without some concerns and some suggestions in terms of how it might be improved. I'm not sure how we're going to do that at this stage. We had an agreement, it was my understanding, for the bill to go to committee for two days of hearings. But at one point the debate collapsed, and for whatever reasons, there was an agreement reached that it would go to third reading. So we haven't had that opportunity to have witnesses come forward, anyone who may have concerns among the public to bring those concerns to the attention of the members of the assembly, and I think that's regrettable. I think there are some very legitimate issues around this legislation on which the minister, his parliamentary assistant and other members of the government, as well as opposition members, would be assisted by that kind of input. Obviously, we are not going to get it now.

I should indicate as well that we're prepared to debate this for some period of time. That may again seem strange to the viewers, given the general consensus surrounding the bill, but—and it's a big "but"—there was an understanding related to a whole range of issues coming before the Legislature, an understanding with the House leaders, the government House leader and the two opposition House leaders, related to the budget. Prior to the tabling of the May 18 budget, there was an indication from the government House leader that there was not an intent to give the budget third reading prior to the break for the summer, that we would have an opportunity to discuss the budget and at some point in the fall the budget bill would come forward for final passage.

Surprise, surprise. After the tabling of the budget, the government's perspective on this has dramatically changed. One can only assume that's based on the public reaction to the budget. The fact is, one political historian has described it as probably the worst-received provincial budget in Canadian history. I think that's probably fair. I think that's probably a fair assessment. It's not a political assessment; it's an assessment by an observer.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): It was a pollster who said that.

Mr Runciman: The pollster has reaffirmed that, has confirmed that fact in terms of the public reaction and the fact that the—

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): Speak to the bill.

Mr Runciman: I am speaking to the reason we're debating the bill tonight, and I think it's important for the public who are viewing this and for others who read Hansard and follow these proceedings to understand why we're debating this and why we will be continuing to debate this because of an understanding we had with respect to the ability to debate the budget bill. We had an understanding with respect to a whole range of issues that are before us and how we could deal with them in a timely manner. Now the government is telling us, "No, we're not going to allow you to have a fulsome budget debate," on a very controversial budget. "We're not going to allow you to have that time. We're not going to allow you to have public hearings on this budget debate." So much for the consultation that the Liberal Party talks about: "Consultation, consultation, consultation." Here we are with the most controversial budget in memory: huge tax hikes, going back on core promises, and you're refusing to allow the public to have any input. That is the history behind why we're standing here this evening discussing Bill 56, a bill that, in general, all three parties are prepared to support.

There are a couple of things I want to put on the record related to this bill, though. My concerns about it centre primarily on the impact on employers, especially small employers. I'm someone who has operated a couple of small businesses in my life, one with about three to four employees, and another a small newspaper and commercial printing business with about nine employees. When you read this legislation and look at what the impact could be—for example, harking back to my experience in having a gentleman who ran the print shop, the press; we had orders to fill. If you look at this bill, there's nothing in here with respect to a requirement to advise the employer that you're going to do this, that you're going to leave for the reasons outlined in the bill. What does that small employer do if he loses that very highly trained individual whom a goodly portion of his business is dependent upon? In my case, in a commercial printing operation, a small commercial printing operation, he was the only individual who could do what he did. We tried to line up the contracts so that he could fulfill them. If he had to take time off, vacation time or what have you, he could handle that, and we could handle that in terms of our scheduling of the various contracts we signed.

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That's just an example of how difficult—

Mr Levac: You'd be compassionate.

Mr Runciman: Certainly we were compassionate. I think most employers in this province are compassionate. The reality here is that the potential is there to create extremely difficult situations.

I also operated a small fishing lodge, campground operation, a seasonal business, and we were very dependent on some people to be around in those situations. If you can lose somebody just like that, without any advice or request in terms of the circumstances, I think that it's truly unfortunate. It was pointed out to me that this is the sort of the thing that the CFIB, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and any other organization that represents small business in this province is failing their members by not raising this issue. Perhaps they planned with best intentions that this bill was going to go to a standing committee for public hearings. Perhaps that was

their intent. I certainly haven't heard from any of the business organizations. I don't think they are aware of the implications of this legislation. If they are, they're negligent, and I don't mind saying that, but I suspect they're not aware, and that says something in terms of their scrutiny of legislation.

It may say something, too, of their reluctance. I've been through this. This is the second time where I've been in government and moved into opposition. You will find in that situation that organizations and individuals have a real reluctance—they call it a honeymoon period, or however you may wish to describe it—they're quite reluctant to be publicly critical of a new government or a new minister. They don't want to rub them the wrong way. That may be a case in point here, where the CFIB or other business organizations have not spoken out with respect to this. Hopefully, before this bill is proclaimed, if not before it receives third reading, they will draw this to the attention of their members and have their input with respect to this and what the business implications might be for them as small business operators and then get that feedback to us as legislators, especially to the Minister of Labour, who has carriage of this bill.

If you take a look—and I know my colleague the House leader for the NDP is going to speak to this as well—at the emergency leave provisions of the Employment Standards Act, that is a much more reasonable way to approach this sort of thing with respect to the yardstick of 50 employees that those responsibilities apply to. If you review the Employment Standards Act, in that particular section dealing with emergency leave there's a whole list, a whole description of the kinds of people who qualify and what the level is for companies that have to comply with the requirements of emergency leave. And there was, I think, a pretty sound rationale for that when it was passed. When you're looking at 50 employees, that's a relatively sized company that can deal with the extended leave of an employee. They have additional people, trained people, who can fill in on overtime or in other ways to meet that challenge. That's not the same, as I said, with the kinds of operations that have one, two, three or nine employees, which have been totally ignored by this legislation.

That raises the question about compensation. There's no reference in here that I can find in my review of the legislation to talk about compensating these people; for example, the guy who loses, for a six- or eight-week period, significant contracts in a printing business, or whatever the business may be, where he has a trained employee, and has to farm out that business to another company so that he doesn't lose that, perhaps, long-time contract. What happens to assist that person to keep his or her business operating? There is no reference whatsoever to that kind of assistance, and I think that is a real weakness here, which I don't believe one Liberal member sitting in the House today has any interest in. But that's not surprising. None of the Liberal members has a great deal of interest in small employers in this province, and I think that's going to continue to be reflected in this province. You wouldn't bring in legislation like this if you really cared, you wouldn't bypass committee hearings if you really cared, and you wouldn't be bringing in a budget that's going to severely punish low-income, medium-income and middle-income Ontarians in this province, going back on a core promise that got you elected to government in the first place.

Interjections.

Mr Runciman: I'm glad I woke you up, anyway—some of you.

To sit here tonight and suggest that you care about these people—the facts defy that. Just look at your budget, and look at this kind of legislation, which should not be passing. I believe that at some point common sense will prevail and this will not be proclaimed, if indeed it gets third reading. Maybe it should just die on the order paper—that may be the best thing to happen—and you will come back with a cleaned-up version at some point in the fall. That may be the best advice, but you're not one to take good advice. The Liberal Party doesn't take good advice. This is another indication of ill-thought-out legislation that was hurried through without sufficient scrutiny.

We know they've established this extensive committee structure involving backbenchers to give them the impression that they're having some kind of meaningful role in policy development. After that budget, they must know they have absolutely no role at all in policy development—at least, not the important development of policy. That's the reality.

Interjection.

Mrs Witmer: Sandra, maybe even ministers don't.

Mr Runciman: No, even ministers don't.

I have strong suspicions that even the Premier doesn't get involved, that even the Premier doesn't know about it. If you were a conspiracy theorist, if you believed in conspiracies—I don't believe this for a minute, but I'm hearing it talked about in the halls of Queen's Park that there was a conspiracy here, and the front bench—I won't mention any names, but five weeks before the budget came down, we had the Premier publicly saying, "No tax increases." You heard that?

Mr Kormos: Yes.

Mr Runciman: We all heard that, "No tax increases," just five weeks before the budget was tabled. How could the Premier go out publicly and say that? I believe he's an honest man and I believe he did not know. I have to believe he's an honest man.

Here's a case where the Premier clearly didn't know what was going on. Why is that? Why was he not advised by his alter ego here, the Minister of Finance? We know the Minister of Finance's track record in terms of keeping the Premier informed, and it's a pretty sad one. What could be the motivation here? Does this mean that Dalton McGuinty will be disappearing into the ether in the next year or so and we'll have a leadership convention in the leadership ranks? Will Sandra Pupatello be running for the leadership? Will Greg Sorbara be running for the leadership? Does Jim Watson have ambitions? We could

name all sorts of folks over there. If there is really a conspiracy here, that may be part of this whole process and what's going on, and why we see legislation like—Mr Speaker, I know you want me to get back to Bill 56.

This may be part and parcel of all of what's going on. This is indicative of a party that simply rushed in here and got into government without being prepared. It took them months and months before they decided they wanted to do anything, and then, when they do something, they bring in legislation like Bill 56, which is full of weaknesses, full of loopholes and full of problems.

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We supposedly have these cabinet committees with backbenchers scrutinizing this kind of thing, and they are failing. They are failing in so many ways, and they're paying the price. We see that in the polls every day, where they are at record lows. The SES poll said he's never seen the leader of a governing party, in his polling experience, at such low levels. Is it 9% of people who support Dalton McGuinty? That's pretty sad.

Part of reason is the fact that they're doing some of these things that are easy. This is one that they looked upon as easy, even though it does not fulfill a promise they made in the campaign.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): Did they break a promise?

Mr Runciman: That's not surprising, I know.

Mr Murdoch: It sure isn't.

Mr Runciman: The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound says he's not surprised that the Liberals broke another promise. If you look at the commitments they made surrounding this during the election, clearly they failed to meet that test as well.

Mr McGuinty told Ontarians that his government would bring in legislation designed to help parents and others to care for relatives who were seriously ill. The promise was to help a family cope when a serious illness struck one of its members, period. They failed to bring in that kind of legislation. They have taken a modest step, a hurried step, a flawed step, to deal with one particular element. In so doing, I think they have at least created the potential for serious problems for small business people in Ontario.

I will speak a little bit more about this bill with respect to some of the things I know the member for Waterloo talked about: our position on this and what our budget of last spring proposed. I think we should put that on the record again, just as a comparator with respect to what's happening with Bill 56. In that budget, we proposed to increase the underlying amounts for the disability credit, the caregiver credit, the infirm dependant credit and the disability credit supplement for children with severe disabilities. We proposed to expand the caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit to include spouses or common-law partners who are dependent by reason of a mental or physical infirmity, and we proposed to increase to credit-reduction income levels. If you take all of those together, those improvements which were embodied in last year's Conservative budget would have provided an estimated $50 million in benefits to about 165,000 Ontario taxpayers.

Sadly, that's not happening, because of the election of a government that made 231 promises and, to date, has broken somewhere in the neighbourhood of 30 of those 231 promises. What they have done is superficial, the easy—as I would describe it—initiatives, so that they can hopefully divert public attention in terms of their failures and their breaking of promises in so many other areas.

I wanted to also talk briefly about some of the technical questions that aren't addressed in the bill. I know that the chief whip from our party, the member from Simcoe North, raised a couple of questions. I don't know if they were addressed; I didn't think they were. Is the parliamentary assistant for the minister here? He should be responding to some of these questions, hopefully. It would be unusual if the parliamentary assistant weren't here, if the minister's not. I would hope he or she is in the House this evening. It would be shameful if both of them were absent. I don't know if they are. I am not referencing anyone's absence; I'm just asking a question and pointing out that it would be highly unusual, when debating legislation, if the minister and/or the parliamentary assistant were not in the House during the debate.

Mr Kormos: Cause for concern.

Mr Runciman: It would be. It is; there is no question about it.

Interjection.

Mr Runciman: No, it isn't. It's a legitimate question.

Mr Levac: Standard practice.

Mr Kormos: Since when?

Mr Runciman: It's standard practice with Liberals perhaps; not standard practice in this Legislature.

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Bob, you're putting me to sleep here.

Mr Runciman: I'd hate to see that.

There are a few technical questions which should be put on the record as well, that aren't addressed in this bill. You and I know that many employers already provide compassionate leave for their employees. The question is, is the leave provided under this bill going to be in addition to existing benefits? Will it replace them? Which program has priority?

What grounds would an employer have for refusing an application for compassionate leave? I think that's an important element of this, which again is left for one to ponder. There's really no reference to that. If your business is going to collapse, is that grounds to try and work out another kind of arrangement, an agreement with an employee, if an employee is going to be rigid and say, "No, I have law on my side, Mr Employer. I don't care if your business goes bankrupt. I'm leaving, so goodbye," or if you lose thousands and thousands of dollars, lose important contracts, "I'm gone and you can't do anything about it"?

There has got to be some kind of mechanism built in to at recognize those kinds of situations and know what recourse is available. That's left missing in action, if you

will. There's nothing, no reference here. Is there any kind of eligibility term? What if you're a new employee? You've been there for one or two weeks and go to your employer, or not go to your employer—you're not even required to go to your employer—and away you go and you take the use of the provisions of this legislation, and you've only been in that person's employ for two or three weeks. Is that appropriate?

I'm raising this as a legitimate question. Is that what the government feels is appropriate? Again, it's silent. It's silent on so many of these issues and concerns. Again, as I said, I think this was rushed through without thorough consideration of all the implications. It's kind of a feel-good piece of legislation: "Let's throw something out there to make the public think we're doing something positive and productive here." That's what has happened in this situation and in so many cases where they're bringing forward legislation or initiatives of which they really have not thought through the implications. I think delisting is a good example: the delisting of health care services which are critical for so many people and using the justification that we're going to save money.

Mr Kormos: Did caucus vote on that?

Mr Runciman: Yes. Did caucus know about that?

Mr Kormos: No.

Mr Runciman: No, of course they didn't. They campaigned on doing just the opposite. This is again a situation where I don't think they really took a close look at it. I think Bill 56 is an indication of that.

Delisting is a much more significant indication of that. What studies were done to really measure the implications? I don't think there were any studies done. This is an ill-thought-out, short-term so-called savings which I think over the next year or two is going to come and bite you in a big way. I'm not just talking about the public reaction—that's already biting you in a big way; I'm talking about the cost implications, which are going to be significant. They're certainly going to override any short-term savings that the government may realize. All of us, as taxpayers, are going to realize that bite. It's not just going to be a political bite; it's going to be a very significant cost bite. Again, I raise that in the context of ill-conceived legislation, ill-thought-out legislation, feel-good legislation, which really creates more problems than it solves.

When we talk about employers, another thing that I don't see referenced in here is what happens in situations where, for example, a small business with eight or nine employees has an employee who has to do this, or feels he or she has to do this, and the employer refuses. What are the enforcement mechanisms? We don't hear any reference to enforcement mechanisms.

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Those of us who have been in this place for some time have heard about overbearing officials—on occasion in the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of the Environment and a number of ministries—who run roughshod over small business people, over farmers, over a whole range of people in the province, and there's very little recourse for those employers who feel hard done by as a result of harassment, in their view, by a government inspector.

There's no reference in this legislation—did you find any with respect to enforcement?

Mr Kormos: No.

Mr Runciman: I don't see any. It's silent again. There are so many areas here where not just the small business community but anybody who cares about this sort of thing should be concerned about the omissions, the failure to even reference in any way, shape or form all of these various implications. When you look at something like this and how it got through without someone at a cabinet policy committee taking a look at this and saying, "Why the hell isn't this here? Who have you talked to? Have we consulted with anyone in the business community about this? Who have we talked to before we move ahead with this?"—some bureaucrat in the Ministry of Labour whose light bulb goes on, click, "Here's something we can do, quick and dirty, and get you a little credit for it with somebody. Let's shove this in," and have the minister stand up in the House, shove it in front of him, "Looks good to me." It breezes through some kind of a policy committee who obviously didn't do their job, didn't raise the appropriate questions, didn't give this scrutiny, didn't do any kind of research. They let this thing come to our House, come to this assembly, and then the House leader, in one of these sleights of hand, avoids committee hearings.

We had an agreement, an understanding, that this bill was going to go to public hearings for two days in the standing committee. At that point, hopefully, with some advertising by the committee we would have had organizations, perhaps small business people themselves, aware of what's happening and making presentations. We could have made those changes to a bill, in general terms anyway, that we agree with the intent and what you're trying to accomplish here—

Mr Murdoch: No committee hearings.

Mr Runciman: No committee hearings. But that's like the budget: the most controversial budget in our history in this place and they don't want the public to have any input, express any concerns or talk about implications down the road as a result of the some of the dramatic changes they've brought forward in this budget.

I've been referencing some of the problems, and there are many. There's also a contradiction. I'm not sure if my colleague raised this about the eight-week time limit for being granted compassionate leave and the 26-week time estimate which is related to the potential death of a family member. Doctors have to estimate that your mother, your father or your wife, whoever, is going to live for the next 20 weeks or something like that. That's the process, and the legislation doesn't address other scenarios for special or extended cases.

There's also a problem we want to reiterate, and that deals with doctors and family members in other provinces or other countries. Again, this is something it's silent on. It doesn't talk about the challenges that the legislation poses in those kinds of situations. Doctors

who are outside of Ontario could be unfamiliar with the program, and that again could lead to delays, which indeed could be unfortunate.

The medical systems in other countries operate differently, and that again raises many questions and problems in other nations. If you're an immigrant to this country and you want to go back to your home country, your mother or father is gravely ill and is expected to pass away, how do you work out a situation like that? Again, the legislation doesn't speak to those kinds of extenuating circumstances.

I know my colleague from Waterloo talked about essential workers in a health care emergency. I think you talked about the SARS situation, that kind of thing, where again we don't know what happens in those kinds of situations. When a doctor or a nurse needs to take that kind of compassionate leave, what are the implications of that?

We could also talk about those other essential services, like firefighters, police officers and our correctional officers. Again, what are the implications dealing with those kinds of essential services and providing leave for individuals under this legislation without helping that organization cope with the consequences of that individual being gone for an extended period of time? There are public safety consequences related to that as well, and public health consequences in terms of health care workers, nurses and doctors.

There are serious flaws and serious omissions in this legislation, and it's truly indicative of this Liberal government's failure to adequately review and consider before they move ahead.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: It's 9 o'clock at night already and, heck, I have to wait 10 more minutes before I can start speaking. Wouldn't you know it? The first one-hour leadoff I get to do since the election of October 2, and I have to split it in half. What can I say? I feel abused, but I will do my best.

What that means is that we're going to be talking about this bill in third reading—I am as shocked as the member from Leeds-Grenville about the failure of the government to put this to committee. I am not about to tell this government how to conduct its business, but I find it astounding, amazing, that this rough-around-the-edges legislation—people are going to support the bill. Quite frankly, there's almost a bizarre sense on the part of the opposition that we want to support the bill to see it explode in your faces, because it's rough around the edges. You may not recall, and I'm indifferent as to whether you do or not, that during second reading debate I said that this is the sort of bill that should go to committee; it can be finessed, it can be fine-tuned, it can be adjusted. I'm going to speak more to that in around 10 minutes' time. But you didn't want to go to committee. God bless; then you live with the consequences.

My fear is that this bill may never see proclamation, as Mr Runciman has already spoken to. My fear is that this bill, which is fundamentally a positive thing, is going to end up in that legislative orbit and then find its way into a black hole and disappear there and never be proclaimed. Your failure to put it to committee is as strong an indicator of that likelihood as anything.

Mr Qaadri: To the people of Ontario, I would like to first of all commend the MPP from Leeds-Grenville for his recently found concern for some of the disadvantaged people, although I must say to him that we actually miss your signature statement, which is of course to shout at the end of each of your statements with your mock indignation.

I'd like to begin by quoting for a moment from the Bible, in which it is written, "To whom hath the root of wisdom been revealed? For the Lord is full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering, and very pitiful, and forgiveth sins, and saveth in time of affliction."

The MPP from Leeds-Grenville actually used the phrase "caring for people" in a continued mock indignation. But I'd like to submit, it's precisely with that vision that we in the government are bringing forward Bill 56, a family medical leave act.

I can speak to you for a moment as a physician. I recall a patient who was diagnosed with what we call hepatocellular carcinoma, meaning liver cancer, which unfortunately had left home, meaning left the confines of the liver and disseminated or had, as doctors would say, metastasized. This is a catastrophic illness, which of course invokes the provisions of this particular bill. The individual concerned was in their mid-50s. Their son was in his early 30s. The amount of stress and strain and suffering—physical, mental, emotional—is something that we in the government are very conscious of. That is why we are bringing forward this bill to deal with catastrophic terminal illness, in order to help the people of Ontario at one of the most challenging times.

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Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I look forward to the opportunity to respond to the comments of the members for Kitchener-Waterloo and Leeds-Grenville. I would hope the government would bring forward some answers regarding refusing leave without grounds. What is the appeal process and how would the appeal process be put in place? How long would you be in the employ of a person before you were allowed this leave, and what takes place in contract situations?

One of the areas that I wanted to comment on was with regard to the member for Leeds-Grenville. I know it took place in other businesses, and it's small businesses that will be impacted. Businesses are in place to make money, and they make decisions based on that. For example, in small communities, what happens in a small police force, for example, when you have two individuals who are married, who now have an individual—and heaven forbid that somebody passes on. Nobody wants to see people in these situations, but you have to look at the practicality from a business aspect on this and their situation. What do you do in a small police force where you not only lose one, but both individuals will now be subject to that leave? That police force or that business

would then have to replace those individuals with somebody in the interim while they're not there.

The reality is that business will try to compensate for that. We realize that business will move on and will look at that, but then you'll find out that the quality of life will change for those individuals, because what they'll subsequently do is put them on two different shifts. That way you don't have both individuals on the same shift being impacted in their business practicalities. Some of the problems of the quality of life for those individuals will be impacted substantially. I know that when the paternity leave came forward, this was the exact conversation that police chiefs were having when they were making these decisions: "Do we hire these individuals now married to each other on the force?" If this situation comes up, the impact on the work-related opportunities that come forward would be substantially hit. I hope the government has looked at it. Quite possibly, as the member for Leeds-Grenville mentioned, the impact on those communities will be looked at through the committee process.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I will confess that I'm not the world's most eloquent speaker, and I tend to think in terms of bills on a personal level. I think back to a period in time when my mother was passing away. My mum contracted cancer, ironically a cancer that, were she to be alive today, would be relatively easily cured. But at that time it was a gradual, downhill road for her. I watched my father working and trying to look after her.

I think every one of us would agree that anyone who has a choice would prefer to die at home with the family supports. This is no disrespect to hospitals, but I think everyone would prefer to die at home. I watched my father struggle, and there were days that I missed school to stay home to be with my mother because of the care she needed, because if that care wasn't provided, she was going to have to go to the hospital. Certainly, there was a fear. My father simply didn't have the option of taking time off work, and money wasn't the issue; the issue was, he would lose his job and have to start again after dealing with all of this other crisis.

I wholeheartedly support this bill. This is a bill that humanity—and there may be warts and there may need to be things worked out in the regulations and so forth. I hope, when we're looking at it, we also recognize that for many individuals in this province, when they lose a loved one, they get one or two or three days off of work to grieve and then they're expected to be back and to move on with their lives. Sometimes, it's not that easy, folks. Sometimes there is no normal to go back to. There is a new normal, and the normal may be that you never forget the old normal. There needs to be consideration that a person isn't fully restored in two or three days to be back, and that there be flexibility to allow for the need to grieve and be able to return to a productive life. This is a tremendous bill, and I wholeheartedly support it.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the questions and comments. One of the opposition members has two minutes to reply. The member from Leeds-Grenville.

Mr Runciman: We appreciate the input of the various members. Stephen Harper made an interesting and much-quoted comment at the outset of the federal campaign: that you don't have to be a Liberal to be a Canadian and you don't have to be a Liberal to be compassionate, although you wouldn't know that by listening to members of this assembly who are members of the Liberal Party. I have to tell you that those of us on this side of the House tend to resent that kind of arrogance, and I think most Ontarians do as well.

In terms of compassion, I've worked all my life for people in this province. I'm a union president. I suffered a severe industrial accident, and for somebody who just arrived in this House to suggest that any of my indignation or strength of feeling is mock, is phony, is false, is offensive to me. I lost a son to cancer. So anyone who suggests I don't understand that, I resent as well. I think when people want to have holier-than-thou approaches to this place, they should sit back and think about it a little bit more than they do today.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Kormos: As I commence a one-hour leadoff on behalf of the New Democratic Party, I feel compelled to comment on the final words of Mr Runciman: a pointed commentary and said in far less than the two minutes allowed him, but more than adequately stated.

Look, I'm going to talk about the bill, and I want you to know, I take some comfort in the nature of the debate throughout the course of the evening. I take some comfort in various government members having talked about minimum wage, having talked about broken promises. I take that as a guideline for my own comments around this bill, that of course the government members who were talking about this wide range of things were clearly relating them to the bill. They were putting the bill in context, I'm sure, when they were doing that.

So I appreciate the guidance that government members have given me throughout the evening in terms of the breadth that will be allowed me as I comment on Bill 56. Do you understand what I'm saying, Speaker? I look forward to the standard that was established by the government members speaking to the bill being applied to me, and I will aspire to that standard, which takes me to an e-mail that I got today.

Hold on, because we're going to talk about Bill 56 in the context of real people, and this e-mail happens to be from a real person, because you know I've suggested that the government put this bill together in a rather haphazard fashion. Look, nobody disputes the goal that's being pursued here. Nobody disputes that; nobody. But I have serious concerns about the lack of thought that was put into the bill and about this government's failure to put the bill out to committee. What were you afraid of in terms of not wanting to consult with any number of people who would have had some sage advice around some fine-tuning that the bill could have withstood?

But back to the e-mail that I got today. Again, I'm going to suggest that the bill was not well thought out and that the bill was an effort on the part of this govern-

ment to generate some good news in the context of some very bad news.

Look, we all know about these outlaw biker gangs. You might have seen them on the 401, the biker guys with the handlebars, but did you notice they have tattoos that say "1%er"? Do you know what I'm talking about, Mr Murdoch, the little "1%er"? I expect the Liberals to be showing up with tattoos saying "9%er." It could become sort of a mark of the fraternity and sorority of Liberal membership that they're 9%ers. I just thought it would be novel: the outlaw bikers with their "1%er"—and they wear the little badges saying "1%er" too—and the Liberals could wear badges saying "9%er," because they're part of this unique club.

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But I wanted to get back to, of course, the bill, and I want to talk about the context in which we have to look at what the bill will achieve for real Ontarians. I got an e-mail today, and the e-mail is from Marie Belliveau. I'm going to give the hard copy to Hansard so they spell Ms Belliveau's name correctly. She's from St Catharines. The e-mail is a copy of the letter that she sent to Mr McGuinty. Ms Belliveau is on ODSP. She's disabled and has been on ODSP for some time. She wrote:

"Premier McGuinty"—very politely—

"I just received your letter assuring me that this budget"—referring to the budget of a couple of weeks ago—"includes changes that will benefit disabled persons and persons waiting for supplemental housing in Ontario.

"To begin with, being a person on ODSP, I earn the maximum of $930 a month. When you add 3% to that it comes to $957.90 (or a $27.90 increase). Even if I am mistaken and it is doubled, this means it is a bit better but not that much at $55.80 per month. This is all well and good, but if you were living in abject poverty for the past 11 years and someone told you they were going to give you a $28 or $56 increase, how would you feel? This will bring our total year's income to $11,494.80 (or is it $11,829.60?). Still too far below the poverty line, no matter which figure you use! When you consider the increases in hydro, gasoline, oil heating, rents and not to mention food and clothing over the past 11 years, that does not even make a dent. Since I am not one to refuse any help now, due to learning how to beg and borrow these past few years, I will of course use it, but you must not be serious when you try to convince me that this is your idea of helping the disabled persons of this province.

"Most cheap apartments now (one-bedroom) are $600-plus, and even rooming houses are $425 a month and usually filthy and upstairs, which is not good for most disabled or senior persons. Why is it that our governments (not just yours) feel that it is OK to make our seniors and disabled persons live in poverty, filth and in rundown buildings and institutions? Is there somewhere an unwritten law for governments not to pay any attention to people in these circumstances? You don't have to answer that. I am, of course, venting and doing a little ranting, but it does seem rather suspect that no government really does anything meaningful to change these facts (even though they swear that they really care).

"I have not seen anything in your budget that deals with supplemental housing for our most needy persons. I personally have been on the list for housing for eight years, and I know I am not the only one in Niagara. I have begged to be allowed to stay in my own apartment and let them supplement my rent here, and that would also take me off the list and free up space for someone else. I am told this is not how they work, even though it would be a sensible solution. I pay $586 per month rent, inclusive, but the rent is to be raised to $600 in November of this year, which will leave me $330 to live on and pay any other bills I might have and buy food and clothing.

"Yes, I could work a few hours a week (that is all I am allowed), but if I earn more than $160 a month, money gets deducted for any earnings. By the way, at $7 per hour, that means I would work 5.7 hours a week before anything was deducted. After that, they allow you 25% of you what earn, and if you work, they try to push you off of ODSP, even though you may never be able to work enough hours to pay your own way (and most would prefer to pay their own way, contrary to what many in government think, rather than to be ill, disabled or aged and begging for everything they need to meagrely live).

"Again, I am very aware that there are many worse off than I, but for goodness' sake, tell me why. In a country as rich as this, and the richest province in this country, why are people subjected to this kind of poverty, total disgust, disdain and pain?

"Well, Premier, can you answer that question? I would like a personal answer from you, not a form letter from an assistant. Please be sure to think about it because this will be sent to others and all will be awaiting your answer. If perhaps I do not get an answer, people will also be made aware of that fact.

"Yes, I am frustrated and extremely tired of waiting and hoping in vain for our governments to somehow gain a real conscience, not just pay lip service to disabled and senior persons.

"Yours in poverty,

"Marie L. Belliveau

"St Catharines."

I just got that and I felt compelled to address the Legislature with the content of it.

As you recall—was it last night or the night before?—earlier this week I had occasion to read a similar e-mail. Remember, that was from Tracey Cruise, talking about her son Jay and his visit up here to Queen's Park.

These messages aren't from politicians, they're not from spin doctors, they're not from consultants and they're not from political hacks; they're from real folks. They are honest messages. They are straightforward.

It was yesterday that a Liberal backbencher—who believes he should have been a cabinet minister; Lord knows he had seniority over the other Ottawa members and he has been bitter about it ever since—accused me of fabricating Tracey Cruise. He did. He was heckling me

while I was reading her message. I recall the heckling. It was: "Oh, you're making this up. There is no such person saying those sorts of things," about the privatization of health care that this government did in the course of their budget."

Ms Cruise was not amused to be accused of being a non-person. She already feels hard enough done by by this government, to then suffer the insult of being told she doesn't exist, that she's a fabrication of some creative, or perhaps not so creative, imagination. It's not nice to accuse people of not existing. I want you to understand that. They sort of resent it. They take it to heart. So I'm impressed that this evening nobody accuses Marie Belliveau of not existing. She exists, all right; she just barely exists. The 3% increase in her ODSP benefits after years of nothing doesn't change her reality very much.

If you or I, if any of us here, gets a 3% raise, a 2% raise, a 1% raise, heck, if we get no raise, we're still doing quite fine, thank you very much. Put this in perspective. I'm going to get to Bill 56. We have the luxury, when we walk to Queen's Park, if a homeless person has got his or her hand outstretched, we don't have to think about pulling a loonie or a toonie or a fiver out of our pocket. We don't have to worry about how that's going to impact on our budget, because our salary here, the minimum wage, is $85,000. We've gone through this over and over again, and most people, other than a handful of people here, make in excess of that $85,000 a year. But the vast majority of Ontarians out there literally have to consider what it means to put a toonie in a panhandler's cup. That's how tight their budgets are.

You heard from Ms Cruise, who talks about a two-income family, and she says that things are so tight right now—and of course her focus was on this incredible new tax burden you've imposed on her, your so-called health premium tax levy. Ms Cruise is trying to explain to you folks that she has to budget, even with two incomes in that family, every single expenditure.

You see, there's a huge gulf between people at our income level—politicians are well-paid in this province and in this country—and the vast majority of hard-working Ontarians and Canadians. Here you've got a woman who is living on $11,494.80 a year in one of the larger urban centres in Ontario, St Catharines. That is below any poverty level.

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So here we've got Bill 56, and again it sounds so good, sounds so warm and supportive, and oh, so nice and caring that you're allowed to take time off from your job for up to—what is it?—eight weeks to care for a limited class of people who are dying.

The bottom line is that most Ontarians can't afford to do it. It's not to say the bill is bad, but let's understand that most Ontarians can't afford to take unpaid time off of work. The bill is an effort to harmonize the right to leave with EI, unemployment insurance eligibility. Most Ontarians can't afford to take eight weeks off even with EI being paid them, because the EI, as you all know, is but a modest fraction of what their actual earnings are.

If you're making $10 an hour, it is impossible because you don't have savings when you're making $10 an hour. You spend every penny you make—plus. When you're making $10 an hour, you get excited when you get one of those credit card applications in the mail. You fill it out hoping that you will get a couple of—well, you do. You figure, "It must be some mistake, but heck, I'm going to fill this out. I just may get myself a credit card." The prospect of having a couple of thousand dollars' worth of credit on a credit card from one of those vicious banks, at 18% and 19% interest—think about that. There are things that you need in your household.

That's my first comment, as it was during second reading, about this bill: Let's not be too cocky about this. The vast majority of workers will never be able to avail themselves of this leave. It is just financially impossible for them.

What does that really say, then? What's the real issue? What's the real problem? What you've got to do is have a physician or a surgeon or a doctor, a medical doctor, certify that a spouse or a parent is dying.

Let's be careful, I say to one of the Liberal commentators during the two minutes of questions and comments, after the member from Leeds-Grenville, who made his comments, about how mean-spirited—again, I'm convinced this wasn't the intent of the people who drafted the bill, but one of the Liberal backbenchers talked about the fact that when a person dies there is a grieving process. I acknowledge that, and it is so variable from person to person.

But look what the bill does. Take a look at section 3, which is the new subsection 49.1(5) of the Employment Standards Act:

"The employee may not remain on a leave under this section"—that's the leave for up to eight weeks, and catch this—"after the earlier of the following days:

"1. The last day of the week in which the individual described in subsection (3) dies."

Do you see what happens? I'm not suggesting anybody maliciously put this into the bill, but that means that if your mom or your dad or your grandma or your granddad or your spouse dies on Friday, your leave ends—what would that make it? I guess you would have to be back at work on Monday.

So you've got a Liberal member who makes an astute observation, an astute comment, that the whole process of tending to a dying loved one and the involvement doesn't end upon their death. It carries on until one resolves it, and some people may never resolve it, and I understand that.

But the bill is so very short-sighted that it says your leave ends, effectively, at the earliest possible opportunity after that person's death. Surely that's not the compassion that was being talked about, is it? Wasn't that the sort of thing that could have been and should have been addressed during committee hearings, and maybe tinkered with a little bit with the advice of any number of people? Everybody is prepared to give advice. But isn't that the sort of thing that could have been addressed and

should have been addressed during committee? Here we are in third reading with, dare I say it, barely a snowball's chance in Hades of this bill ever going to committee of the whole. That's one illustration.

During second reading debate, I talked about it, and again, sadly, people have been exposed to the reality of Alzheimer's because of the death of a former American president. I talked about the fact that this requires that a person be dying. I said, "What about the spouse?" Hold on, Speaker, please. What about the spouse or loved one who is in the final days of lucidity as Alzheimer's attacks their mind and nervous system? Surely, a bill of this type would be as interested in providing the same sort of leave if you're losing a spouse or a parent or even a child to Alzheimer's as it would when you're losing them to outright death.

Isn't that the sort of thing that could have been addressed in committee? Is that such an unreasonable proposition that it didn't warrant any consideration or debate? Is it so remote from the reality of families in this province that maybe the bill should be expanded to include the loss of a loved one to Alzheimer's and not necessarily death?

I don't think there is one of us who hasn't had participation in the life of a person with Alzheimer's, whether it be immediate or somewhat more distant. As we all know, you lose your spouse or your parent to Alzheimer's long before they die, and what they become is something far different than what they were, of course, before they had Alzheimer's. But when they die, after having had Alzheimer's for 10 years, when they are deep in the bowels of that, it is really a far different kind of death. It is a death that you experience probably many times over.

I have more time. As a matter of fact, I have 38 more minutes. There are more elements of this bill that warrant consideration. I would ask government members to please consider asking their Minister of Labour and their Premier's office to let this bill to go into committee of the whole so that amendments can be proposed and there can be debate around those amendments. The urgency with which the minister wants to see this bill pass has created a bill that I say may not even see proclamation because of the rough edges. And then what kind of bragging rights have you got? Zip. You've got no bragging rights. None whatsoever. Because that will mean that you failed miserably, that you failed those people whose family members suffer from Alzheimer's and are at the cusp of being lost to the darkness of Alzheimer's. That means that you have failed the person who thought he or she was entitled to eight weeks of leave, but then the loved one dies after the second week of leave, and the person isn't even entitled to an additional week of that eight weeks to grieve. That's not compassion; that's opportunism on the part of this government.

I look forward to the next opportunity to debate this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. It being 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 pm.

The House adjourned at 2129.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 9 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 9 juin 2004

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I'm pleased to rise today to welcome members of my community who have come to Toronto to bring me a petition. They are from Brock township and are keen to make the government aware of the need the community has for a community health centre.

Brock township has been declared an underserviced area by the Ministry of Health. They have an immediate need for the range of community services that a community health centre would provide. They have the support of the local district health council. They have my support. They hope the funding will be forthcoming in the near future. I'm heartened to see signals from the ministry and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care that the funding for their proposal will be available soon.

Several of the community volunteers who have been active in promoting the Brock community health centre are in the gallery today. I would like to welcome Joanne Lloyd, Janet Vendrig and Larry O'Connor. I want to mention that Larry is a former member of provincial Parliament and was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care when he was here. I'd like to thank them for coming and also to thank all the community volunteers who have worked so long on this project.

BLOOD DONATION

Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): I rise today to inform you, all the members and the public that I participated in a blood donor clinic at the Mississauga Seniors' Centre on Thursday, May 27.

The Canadian Blood Services is the successor agency to the Red Cross and the Canadian Blood Agency. Each year there are thousands of people who require blood transfusions. Blood transfusions are needed for trauma victims, burns, heart surgery, leukemia and other diseases such as sickle cell disease. The number of organ transplants has increased steadily from 16 per one million Canadians in 1981, to 59 per one million Canadians in 2000, an increase of three and a half times in only 19 years. One donation of blood can help up to four people, but only 4% of eligible Canadians donate blood.

As all of us work to build our Ontario, it is important to know that each of us can help our hospitals, doctors and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care by giving blood. As the Canadian Blood Services says, "Blood: It's in us to give."

GIRLZ UNPLUGGED

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I rise today to bring attention to a valuable program offered by the YWCA in Muskoka. Girlz Unplugged is a school-based anti-violence program that promotes self-esteem and confidence-building in girls at risk.

This year alone, more than 70 girls aged 10 to 14 from eight schools across Muskoka benefited from the program. In the past two years, the Muskoka YWCA has been able to offer this program through the generous support of anti-violence funding from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines.

Unfortunately, once the province redraws the lines for northern Ontario, young women at risk will no longer be able to participate in this program. This is yet another of the many valuable programs which will be lost as a result of this government's mean-spirited decision to remove the northern designation for the communities in the district of Muskoka.

Like many places in northern Ontario, the Muskoka YWCA was opened to address the social risks affecting women and families due to a seasonal economy and underemployment. There are over 1,700 single-parent families, 1,400 of which are headed by women. The Muskoka YWCA has waiting lists for sexual assault trauma therapy, a full women's shelter and a shortage of affordable housing. Providing programs for young women at risk is one way of breaking the cycle of violence and abuse. The government's decision to remove the northern Ontario status for Muskoka will directly affect those who need and benefit from these vital community programs.

DANIEL WHITE

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): Mr Speaker, it is with great sadness that I inform you and my colleagues in the House of the passing of Daniel B. White on May 8. Dan was associate vice-president of technology at the St Clair College of Applied Arts and Technology in Windsor.

Throughout his 32-year career, Dan's leadership and passion for the manufacturing sector led to many new and exciting learning opportunities for St Clair students, providing them a solid foundation for a career in the manufacturing and skilled trades sector.

Most recently, Dan was asked to manage the design and construction of the $41-million Ford Centre for Excellence in Manufacturing, a teaching facility designed to look and feel like the real-world manufacturing environment.

Thanks to Dan's expertise, the college was able to secure $18 million worth of state-of-the-art equipment and teaching software for 50 cents on the dollar, ensuring that students would have the most current technology on which to learn.

Dan White had a clear vision of what a teaching environment should be, a passion for students and the respect of all who came to know him. His legacy will continue through the thousands of lives he touched in the classroom and in the Daniel B. White Scholarship Fund, ensuring that the students of tomorrow have the financial support to achieve their dream of a career in the manufacturing industry.

DEMONSTRATION

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Earlier today, I had the pleasure and the opportunity to join in the Canadian Taxpayers Federation rally here at Queen's Park, joining hundreds of people from all across the province of Ontario. I had the opportunity to speak to people from my riding and also people from the riding of my colleague from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock. They were voicing their abject disappointment, displeasure and fury about the breaking of Liberal promises when it comes to raising taxes on the hard-working people of the province of Ontario.

We were even joined by Howard Hampton, the leader of the NDP, who also agrees that this government is dipping its hand into the pockets of people far too often and far too deep.

John Williamson, Linda Leatherdale and our own finance critic, John Baird, were able to speak to the crowd and gauge the sense of anger that is out there in the people of the province of Ontario.

Today we even heard about Senator Anne Cools, who has lost faith in the Liberal Party in Ottawa.

Those people out there on that lawn today left here making sure that all across the province of Ontario the anger at this government will be directed at their cousins in Ottawa, and on June 28 we're going to see some changes there.

1340

BEACHES INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I rise to talk about that venerable and wonderful institution, the Beaches jazz festival, which is now in its 16th year. It is an absolutely tremendous event that takes place in my community each and every year. Last year, for the city of Toronto it raised some $36 million in new spending, including over $6 million spent in accommodations in hotels in the Toronto area and $13.2 million to the local restaurants.

Indeed, 700,000 people showed up for that jazz festival, making it one of the largest of its kind in Canada.

The most amazing thing is that it's all free. It is the leading festival of its kind that promotes Canadian talent.

Under the brilliant direction, for 16 years now, of Lido Chilelli, the festival itself has grown, and this year it is going to be bigger and better than ever. PartiGras kicks it off on July 16 to 18 in the Distillery District, followed by street jazz from July 22 to 24, and Kew Gardens jazz, the main event, is on July 24 and 25 at Kew Gardens.

But there are also some other spinoffs that people may not be aware of. The Toronto East General Hospital is the main recipient of all the funds raised; they have this year dedicated the newborn maternal wing, calling it the Jazz Festival Wing. That's just great. Kew Beach school has a kids' zone, and all the money raised there goes to talented people who come in and teach the kids about music. The firefighters have their own boot drive. Even Bellefair United Church this year is having a jamming-it-up congregation on Sunday morning, where the jazz festival people are going to play.

Please come out to our community. You will be glad you did.

EMERY COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE BOYS' BASKETBALL TEAM

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): Today I proudly announce the victory of the Emery Collegiate boys' basketball team in its first ever participation in the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations tournament. Emery Collegiate defeated Sarnia's St Clair Secondary School in the spring final to win the title.

The AAA championship win, which was held in Brantford, was a deserved reward after a long year's hard work and effort. Coach Bob Maydo's successful training and mentoring proved to be just unbeatable. This was a phenomenal display of team effort. Although the team boasts strong, talented individual players, Emery relied more on teamwork than on dominant individual efforts to bring home the crown.

I heartily congratulate the Emery Collegiate boys' basketball team for their persistence, team spirit and hard work toward their common goal. They have proved inspiring role models in demonstrating what achievements determination and effort can attain.

We look forward to many more successful displays of skill and camaraderie from our neighbourhood champions. To the coach, principal and staff at Emery, I say congratulations, well done, and I hope for many more.

ESPANOLA LONG-TERM-CARE FACILITY

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): Yesterday I was pleased to attend, with my federal colleague Brent St Denis and Mayor Bernie Gagnon, the grand opening of the Espanola long-term-care facility. This new facility will result in 32 new beds, allowing individuals to have a place to call home, receiving the care they need in their own community.

The Espanola long-term-care facility came to be a reality due to the hard work and determination of the community. This was not an easy task, but nonetheless the people of Espanola pulled together and have raised, to date, over half a million dollars toward the cost of this facility.

I want to recognize the leadership of Clive Fitzjohn, the chair of the hospital board, and Ray Harding, chair of the hospital foundation, for their efforts. The people of Espanola are to be commended for their perseverance to ensure that this long-term-care facility has become a reality for seniors.

I was very pleased that the former mayor of Espanola, Leo Foucault, was the person who cut the ribbon to open this particular facility. Leo is a resident of this facility and was the driving force behind the institution of this complex back in the late 1980s.

I also had the great opportunity of celebrating with the Espanola General Hospital Auxiliary their 50th anniversary of service to the people of Espanola and area.

EDUCATION

Ms Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): In our first eight months in office, the McGuinty government has made some tremendous improvements to Ontario's education system. The Tories implemented a one-size-fits-all funding formula that hurt students. Our formula will better reflect rural, urban, suburban, northern and francophone factors to help our students succeed.

Where the Tories put half a million children in classes of 26 or more, we are reducing class sizes in the critical years, junior kindergarten to grade 3, beginning this September. Under the Tories, 50% of the students who began grade 9 either did not complete or stopped their education after grade 12. We are putting an emphasis on apprenticeship training, raising the dropout age to 18 and targeting support to struggling students.

The Tories watched Ontario's skilled workforce dwindle. We are revamping high school tech equipment so that programs better reflect the needs of Ontario workplaces, and we are increasing the number of people with critical skills to advance our competitive standing.

While the Tories raised tuition by 137%, we have frozen college and university tuition for two years to increase accessibility to higher education.

The facts speak for themselves. In their tenure, the Tories dropped the ball on education. They dropped the ball for the people who will make up the future of this great province. Only the Ontario Liberals are committed to real excellence in public education.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated June 9, 2004, of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have in the galleries today some of the distinguished members of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians: Phil Gillies from Brantford, the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments; Vince Kerrio from Niagara Falls, the 32nd through the 34th Parliament; and Larry O'Connor from Durham-York, the 35th Parliament. We welcome them all here.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

KEEP YOUR PROMISE ON THE GAS PRICE WATCHDOG ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L'OBLIGATION DE TENIR LES PROMESSES ÉLECTORALES CONCERNANT L'AGENT DE SURVEILLANCE DES PRIX DU CARBURANT

Mr Bisson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 93, An Act respecting the price of motor vehicle fuel and the appointment of a Gas Price Watchdog / Projet de loi 93, Loi concernant le prix du carburant pour véhicules automobiles et la nomination d'un agent de surveillance des prix du carburant.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): This exact bill was actually introduced by Liberals back when they were in opposition. As you know, the price of gas is going through the roof. We have people all across Ontario who are upset about the price of gas. What this bill purports to do is to create what's called a gas price watchdog. It's a bill that was introduced in this House before that had the support of the Liberal opposition at the time, and I look forward to their support.

Ce projet de loi donne l'opportunité de créer un « watchdog » pour regarder au prix du gaz. C'est un projet de loi qui a été introduit par les libéraux en opposition et qu'ils avaient supporté. On regarde le support de ce gouvernement quand ça vient à supporter ce projet de loi qu'ils avaient introduit eux-mêmes et que moi, j'introduis encore aujourd'hui, pour être capable de refléter le problème qu'on a avec le prix d'essence.

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PUBLIC ACCOUNTING ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L'EXPERTISE COMPTABLE

Mr Bryant moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act respecting public accounting / Projet de loi 94, Loi concernant l'expertise comptable.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): We'll all be talking during ministers' statements.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORPORATION AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SOCIÉTÉ DES LOTERIES ET DES JEUX DE L'ONTARIO

Mr Arnott moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 95, An Act to amend the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation Act, 1999 / Projet de loi 95, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1999 sur la Société des loteries et des jeux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): By introducing this bill I am seeking to amend the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation Act, 1999, to prohibit the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp from authorizing the establishment of any new gaming premises on or after the day upon which the bill comes into force and to prohibit any gaming premises from expanding their operations on or after that same day.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council would be required to appoint a commission under the Public Inquiries Act to conduct an inquiry to study the social effect that the playing of games of chance has on the public. The commission would be required to make a report to the Lieutenant Governor in Council on its findings after conducting an inquiry and the public would be entitled to inspect the report.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PUBLIC ACCOUNTING

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): After four decades of debate on public accounting practices in Ontario, four decades of hard work by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario, the Certified General Accountants of Ontario and the Society of Management Accountants of Ontario, four decades of discussions, efforts, questions and at times log-jams on how best to move forward, I have good news: The log-jam is broken. Finally we have an agreement on how public accounting standards and access should proceed.

That is why I'm pleased to introduce new legislation today that builds on the high regulatory standards maintained by Ontario's public accountants over many years. The Public Accounting Act, 2004, would bring about the positive, necessary change that investors and industry alike are seeking and that will better serve the public interest.

This bill is a long time in coming. It means a fundamental change for one of our most important and valued professions. This government is proposing what will amount to one of the most significant changes for this profession in over 40 years.

We know how valuable comprehensive, reliable standards for public accountants are to protecting Ontario's economic credibility, at home and abroad. Good accounting means good business, and good business is good for Ontario.

If passed, this legislation would further ensure that the current internationally recognized high standards in Ontario are not only maintained but increased over time by a reconstituted Public Accountants Council. The council would encourage more rigorous testing, harmonize the regulation of public accounting with evolving national and international standards, and strengthen regulatory transparency, independence and accountability within the field. The bill, if passed, would also create a new structure that favours fairness and competition without compromising Ontario's public accounting standards.

The reforms contained within this bill would mean that the principal accounting organizations that represent CAs, CGAs and CMAs would demonstrate their ability to meet the standards set by the reconstituted Public Accountants Council and become responsible for the direct licensing and governance of individual public accountants. Over time, there may be other bodies which will meet the standards set by the council and will be able to license their members. The act provides for this.

The licensing system is a cornerstone of the reform package that will provide access to licences to a broader range of accounting professionals, consistent with the

public interest and maintaining the high standard of which Ontario proudly boasts.

With a new public accounting system, based on the principles of protecting the public interest and fostering competition and innovation in the design of a professional, self-governing regime, we can be assured that the practice of public accounting in Ontario will remain among best in the world.

The three principal accounting organizations are to be commended for their ability to work together in the public interest and stand together in supporting the reforms embodied in this bill. I'd like to acknowledge the representatives of the three organizations who are in the gallery today: Rod Barr of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario; David Hipgrave of the Society of Management Accountants of Ontario; and Ron Colucci of the Certified General Accountants of Ontario. Congratulations to you all.

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Ron Daniels, dean of the faculty of law at the University of Toronto, for his commitment to bringing together the consensus that has led to the formation of this proposed legislation. Bravo, Dean Daniels.

I also extend my gratitude to the many members of the professional public service who worked long and hard over many years on what is a difficult and complicated issue, but a very important one. I recognize your professionalism and dedication, I appreciate it, and I thank you.

I'd also like to thank my parliamentary assistant, David Zimmer, for his dedicated work on this bill and for the leadership he has displayed in helping to bring it before the House.

I encourage members of the House to consider supporting this bill with the confidence that it represents a new and innovative approach to professional self-governance that will benefit our thriving economy for many years to come, because a strong and prosperous economy means a quality of life for Ontarians that is second to none.

HEALTH CARE

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): On a day when the galleries are loaded with young people, it strikes me as fully appropriate to talk today about our government's commitment to our Plan for Change budget to rebuild and transform health care in this province. I stood in this House recently to outline some specific ways we are going to do this.

I am proud to speak here today about another major initiative that is going to help Ontarians become the healthiest Canadians. I'm going to speak today about our government's immunization strategy, an essential part of our plan to transform health care for all Ontarians.

Before I do that, I want to tell you briefly about our Plan for Change, a bold four-year plan to transform health care in Ontario. It is inspired by the idea advanced by Roy Romanow and many others that health care is the most essential public service. Our Plan for Change puts Romanow's key ideas into action.

What we are building in Ontario is a responsive, accountable, accessible health care system that serves the needs of all Ontarians. To deliver on this plan, we are restoring and fortifying the essential health services that all Ontarians need. We are using our precious health care resources in the best possible way to deliver the best possible results.

1400

Our strategy is to drive vital health resources down into communities where they can do the most good. Over four years, we will create 150 family health teams, where doctors work alongside nurses, nurse practitioners and other primary care providers to deliver front-line care as close to people's homes as possible.

We will expand home care, community mental health services and long-term care so that more Ontarians can receive the care they need in a community setting.

We are expanding access to essential health care by bringing down wait times for important services like cardiac care, MRI and CT scans, hiring more nurses and making it easier for international physicians to practise medicine here.

Firmly entrenched in this transformation plan is the idea of prevention. Certainly taking care of people when they get ill is central to any publicly funded system, but we must not overlook the enormous importance of helping people to prevent and minimize risks to their health. We have to find a way to get people thinking about their own health and wellness before they're diagnosed with high blood pressure or before they have a cancer scare.

I've said on many occasions that prevention begins with children. That is why I am so pleased to announce today the beginning of a comprehensive immunization strategy that will provide all Ontario children with free vaccines to protect them against chicken pox and meningitis. We are providing all of these vaccines free of charge to children across this province.

Let me say right away that even though these diseases are often called childhood diseases, our government takes them very seriously because they can lead to serious health problems and, in some cases, death. Chicken pox, for example, was once thought just to be a nuisance disease for children. Now we know that chicken pox rashes are an entry point for a more serious form of the infection known as flesh-eating disease.

Meningitis, which causes swelling of the brain and spinal tissue, can be fatal. In 2001, 65 people in our province became ill and eight of Ontario's children died from meningitis. Every year, 890 Ontarians are hospitalized and 234,000 workdays lost because of chicken pox alone. That places a tremendous stress on our province's families and on our economy. It also places a great strain on hospitals and on the health care system as a whole.

In our Plan for Change, we've committed to diverting basic care out of hospitals and into communities. We're making this investment because we know that these diseases can be prevented. And we know that by vaccin-

ating Ontario's children we will save lives. That is why I am so pleased to announce the details of the Ontario childhood immunization strategy.

Over the next three years, we are committing $156 million to this strategy. It will see 3.3 million vaccinations administered to Ontario's children without charge. The program will begin in July, when we will immunize all high-risk two- to four-year-olds against pneumococcal diseases, a leading cause of meningitis. In September, we will immunize all one-year-olds against chicken pox and meningitis. In January 2005, the Ontario childhood vaccination strategy will be fully implemented and all three vaccinations will be delivered to Ontario children as part of routine immunization.

Now, Ontario families will have the benefit of knowing that their children are safe from these diseases, and this will save Ontario families more than $600 per child for these three vaccinations. Our government is making sure that all Ontario children and infants, the most vulnerable people in our society, are kept safe.

The people who can best understand the importance of this program are Ontario's parents. I want to tell you what one parent said about this. Kathryn Blain, chair of the Meningitis Research Foundation, who lost her son to meningitis some years ago, had this to say today: "The McGuinty government has demonstrated real leadership by adding the meningococcal and pneumococcal meningitis vaccines on the province's routine immunization schedule. Ontario's move will help ensure that children no longer suffer from the effects of these preventable diseases."

Our strategy will transform Ontario's record on public immunization dramatically. With today's announcements, we will go from being one of the worst provinces on immunization to one of the only provinces that provides free immunization for chicken pox, meningitis and pneumococcal disease to all of our children. This will also give us one of the most comprehensive free vaccination programs of any jurisdiction to be found in North America. That's something that I believe we can all take pride in.

Our transformation agenda will involve making some tough decisions, but the decision to protect the health of Ontario's children is not tough at all. We owe it to them, their families and all Ontarians, to protect these vulnerable members of society and to ensure their sustained good health by removing the financial burden of vaccinations on families.

The province-wide immunization plan that I am announcing is the right choice for Ontarians. Our government has a plan to rebuild and transform this province's health care system. Today's announcement is another step in that process, one that protects children, helps families and benefits all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): The announcement today of the vaccination and immunization program for our children is a very positive step forward in protecting the most vulnerable members of our society: our children. The announcement today is of tremendous benefit to the children in this province and their parents.

We owe a debt of gratitude to people like Kathryn Blain, from my community, the chair of the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada, who lost her son to meningitis. People have worked extremely hard in order to encourage both the federal and provincial governments to introduce immunization for these vulnerable children.

The decision for this government was certainly made much easier by the fact that in the 2004 federal budget the Prime Minister proposed $300 million for a national immunization strategy to ensure children across Canada have equal access to vaccines. So this government was certainly obligated to make sure that that money was going to be utilized in order to provide immunization for our children. This will help ensure that children no longer suffer from the effects of these very preventable diseases, and it is also going to provide access regardless of their ability to pay.

It's also important to mention that my colleague Shelley Martel has certainly been advocating for this. I introduced a private member's bill on April 29 to amend the Health Insurance Act to make sure that these very immunizations would be provided for all children in this province regardless of ability to pay. I think all sides of this House have been working very hard with the medical community and with parents and families in this province. This is certainly a very good step forward.

In January 2003, our government had taken that first step toward an immunization program by announcing that all HIV-positive babies born on or after January 1, 2002, would be offered vaccination against meningococcal meningitis as well as pneumococcal disease. This is a good day for children and families in the province of Ontario.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTING

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm pleased to stand up and respond to the Ministry of the Attorney General's public accounting legislation. I'd just like to note that the Attorney General did not extend thanks—and he extended thanks to a lot of different people and bodies—to the PC government, which introduced public accounting reforms in August 2003, guided by the recommendations made by Ronald J. Daniels, dean of the faculty of law, University of Toronto. I may add, he was appointed by the Progressive Conservative government in October 2002.

When he completed his report, Ronald J. Daniels stated: "Let me finally note that if the regime adopted in this report is adopted in a timely manner, I am confident that the accounting profession in the province will be better equipped to support the commercial needs and interests of Ontario's citizens. It is to this task of building an enhanced system of public accounting regulation to which the province must now turn with alacrity and determination."

We're pleased that the legislation will use the existing internationally recognized public accounting standards as the interim standards and share the commitment to driving the current standards higher still. We are especially pleased that the legislation will ensure that the other accounting bodies meet the required high standards for public accounting before they can license their members and that all public accounting services will remain regulated.

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HEALTH CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): First of all, I want to respond to some of the general comments the Minister of Health made earlier today. The Minister of Health wants people across Ontario to believe that the budget and the Ministry of Health are now into a regime of prevention. I just want to remind the Minister of Health that that's the work that chiropractors do. Chiropractors help people to maintain their mobility. They help them to maintain their capacity to continue to work. I say to the Minister of Health, when was the last time you saw a physician get down on the floor with a patient and show them how to do the stretching exercises and the mobility exercises so they can maintain their own health? When was the last time you saw a physician do the kind of work that a physiotherapist does with patients so that they can stay out of hospitals, so that they can stay out of the emergency ward and so that they don't cost the health care system a lot of money?

I say to the minister, don't overstate your case. When you are cutting health services, when you are saying to people they can no longer have a visit to the optometrist to have their eyes checked covered by OHIP, that is not a good thing for health care in Ontario. When the 1.2 million people across Ontario who depend upon access to a chiropractor to maintain their health can no longer have that covered by OHIP, that is not a good day for Ontario. And when patients, many of whom are faced with debilitating injuries, can no longer access a physiotherapist except if they pay for it out of their own pocket, that is not a good day for Ontario citizens.

I just say to the government, when you are actually cutting health services, something you said you were not going to do, don't give yourself a pain in the back by patting yourself too hard, because the chiropractor won't be there to help you.

Now, I just want to make a point with respect to vaccinations and inoculations.

Interjections.

Mr Hampton: I can tell that the Liberals suddenly are very upset. They don't like to be reminded that they're actually cutting health services in Ontario.

With respect to vaccinations and inoculations, we all agree that this is a health service that we need to move on, but I want people to note that what the Minister of Health was saying today is that if everything goes according to plan, some children may get vaccination and inoculation in 2005. When we look at the details of what has emerged so far, it's very spotty. So when the Minister of Health stands up and says "all children," let's be clear: This will not be all children. In fact, what the government has put forward so far is very selective inoculation, very selective vaccination. To parents who think that all children are going to be vaccinated and inoculated: Check the fine print. I urge you to check the fine print now.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTING

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): With respect to the accounting bill, I am glad that the Attorney General has found the faith.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Stop the clock, please. Could I ask the Minister of Health to come to order, please.

Mr Hampton: I just say to the Minister of Health, I want to remind you of your promise to autistic children. You were going to end discrimination against autistic children. I just remind you of that.

With respect to accounting, I'm glad the Attorney General has found the faith. I remember it was only a year and a half ago that when I proposed that this kind of legislation be moved forward, Liberals weren't sure. So I congratulate you on finding the faith.

I want to say that what is contained in this bill is not everything that certified general accountants have asked for. It is not everything that I have asked for, that I believe needs to be done. As usual with Liberals, it's a half step, and among those groups who are happy just to see a half step happen, this is reasonably good news.

I would suggest to the minister that in fact, since you seem to have general agreement on this, I believe we should pass it through second reading today. I ask for unanimous consent, Speaker, that we move this legislation through second reading today.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party has moved that we have second reading of the bill before us today. Agreed?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. There seems to be no unanimous consent.

MEMBERS' ANNIVERSARIES

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would be remiss if we did not note that today the member for Lanark-Carleton, Mr Sterling, and the member for St Catharines, Mr Bradley, are celebrating the 27th anniversary of their election to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That is not a point of order, really. Another point of order?

Hon Mr Duncan: It should be noted that Mr Bradley celebrated that at the new casino in Niagara Falls last night.

RICK HANSEN WHEELS IN MOTION

RICK HANSEN ROULER VERS DEMAIN

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes on the Rick Hansen Wheels in Motion campaign.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent to speak for five minutes for each party on Wheels in Motion? Agreed.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to begin by thanking all members for granting unanimous consent to recognize Rick Hansen and the work of the Man in Motion Foundation.

Many of us first heard the name Rick Hansen some 20 years ago when he started his journey around the world. During his Man in Motion tour, Rick raised more than $26 million, but he accomplished much more than just that. He raised awareness of spinal cord injury, he helped researchers explore new frontiers of medicine and showed all of us the power of the human spirit. I've had the opportunity to meet with Rick Hansen on a couple of occasions since earning the privilege of serving Ontarians as Premier, and I can tell you, within about 30 seconds you stop seeing the wheelchair and you are impressed with his strength, his energy, his determination, his perseverance and his powerful advocacy on behalf of a very important cause.

Le dynamisme et la détermination de Rick nous incitent à croire en nous et à réaliser nos rêves. Aujourd'hui, Rick et sa fondation, l'Homme en mouvement, continuent de nous inspirer.

Rick's drive and determination inspired all of us to believe in ourselves and reach for our dreams. Today he and his Man in Motion Foundation continue to inspire us. Thanks to Rick and his tireless work with the foundation, more children with spinal cord injuries can go to the playground with their friends, more kids can enjoy the thrill of competing in sports, more adults can live independently in their own homes, and medical breakthroughs are closer than ever. For thousands of Canadians, the Man in Motion Foundation has made a real difference in their quality of life.

I know that I speak for all Ontarians when I applaud the work Rick Hansen and the Man in Motion Foundation have done on behalf of all of us. As Premier, I want to urge people all across the province to continue to support this important work and I encourage Ontarians to get involved in the Wheels in Motion event in their communities this Sunday, June 13. Ontarians can wheel, walk, ride or skate to help raise money for spinal cord research and break down barriers facing people with spinal cord injuries.

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Together, we can help find a cure for spinal cord injury, help people with spinal cord injuries enjoy life to the fullest and build stronger communities.

As Rick Hansen himself has said, "If you believe in a dream and have the courage to try, great things can be accomplished." Together, as Ontarians and as Canadians, we can accomplish great things.

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): It's a privilege and an honour for me to rise on behalf of our party and my colleagues. I'm sure I speak for all people, not only in this House but across this province, when I recognize Rick Hansen, an outstanding individual, and all those things that he has stood for, for so many years.

It was a little over a year ago, on February 7, 2003, when we were proud to renew Ontario's commitment to the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation. Rick Hansen certainly was the one who was instrumental in 1998 in convincing the province to do that. I was certainly proud to renew that commitment a year ago for another $25 million, not for the sake of the money alone and not for the sake of Mr Hansen alone, but for the tremendous example that he has set for people across the world who, through no fault of their own, obviously, have had a disability that they have had to overcome in life.

Crises in people's lives quite often not only provide a huge challenge and alteration of an individual's life, but they often also provide and create an opportunity for that individual to respond to that challenge and make a real difference in the lives of others.

Now, in 1973, Mr Hansen was only 15 years old when he certainly had a tremendous life-altering experience, in the form of an automobile accident, and became a paraplegic. He could have easily just given up, but he did not. He pressed on, and he has done many, many things, not just in the areas of neurotrauma and disability. He is a truly outstanding individual.

When I looked through some of his CV today—and I've had the opportunity to talk to Rick on a couple of occasions—I agree with the Premier: That first impression never, never leaves you. He is a person of tremendous strength, courage and determination.

He has fought for the disabled community in terms of the Commonwealth Games, and got them medal status, which will now be recognized for the first time in 2006. He is fighting for the same status in the Olympic Games. He has represented this country in the Olympic Games. He has won 19 marathons around the world. He has lectured in schools. He has gone and talked to classes. He has coached athletic endeavours. He has talked to young people. He has gone out of his way. You could go on and on and on, but the point is that he has truly made a difference.

When you go through some of the appointments and responsibilities he has had, they're not just limited to neurological problems or the disabled community. He has truly been a leader in environmental concerns around the world. He has chaired international congresses. He has led Canada as the commissioner at the world exposition in Australia in 1988. He is truly connected with nature. He has led several projects. He's currently chairing the Fraser River Sturgeon Conservation Society. He's a member of the board of directors and the interim chair

of the Pacific Salmon Endowment Fund Society. His CV would read as any very active and accomplished young person's CV might read. But when you think of the tremendous difference he has made worldwide—he has received an award for the outstanding young person in the world, he has been newsmaker of the year, he has been outstanding athlete of the year, he has chaired the Grey Cup Festival, he has done work in aboriginal affairs, he served as secretary to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on her visit to this country in 1989—he is truly an outstanding individual.

He certainly motivated me when I was sitting over there, and will continue to motivate me, even if I'm over here or out of this place. I'm sure that anybody who has met Rick Hansen will know that he has the courage to stand up and fight for people when he believes all they need is an opportunity to help themselves.

I think that I would urge all Ontarians, all Canadians for that matter, to follow Rick's example and rise to the challenge in just a small part of the way he has responded to the challenges in life he has met, and we all will be the better off for it.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): The New Democrats join the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in honouring Rick Hansen.

This Sunday thousands of people will bike, skate and wheel through communities across Ontario. They will be taking part in Wheels in Motion, an event that raises funds for research into spinal cord injuries.

As others have said, the guiding light behind Wheels in Motion is Rick Hansen, whose leadership and commitment have made a significant contribution to Canada. Rick Hansen's name has become synonymous with courage and determination. Out of personal tragedy he has built a movement and an organization that have made life better for thousands of people.

The Man in Motion world tour has inspired thousands of Canadians to show their support for Rick's crusade, and they donated generously to the Man in Motion Legacy Fund for spinal cord injury research, rehabilitation and wheelchair sports. In all, $216 million was raised during the tour and that became the seed money for the Man in Motion Foundation. Money raised has gone into improving peer support, community and residential access ramps, training assistance dogs, accessibility to children's play and park structures and other quality-of-life initiatives.

Since 1987, the foundation has been a worldwide leader in the area of spinal cord injuries. There is also an ambassador program, a Canada-wide network of volunteers, spokespersons, who share their stories of living with spinal injuries. The Man in Motion Foundation also runs a school program. A Rick Hansen Awards program recognizes those who exhibit the ideals and values of its namesake, and the school program also offers teacher resources so that students across Canada can learn about courage, determination, achievement and other values that Rick Hansen embodies. None of this would have been possible without Rick's drive and determination.

Rick has been breaking down barriers for a long time, and we hope the government will do its part in breaking down barriers for people with disabilities, as expeditiously as possible, by amending the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, I want to salute Rick Hansen for his great work and encourage Ontarians to get things spinning this Sunday by taking part in Wheels in Motion in their communities.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Je veux prendre l'occasion très brièvement pour remercier M. Hansen pour tout l'ouvrage qu'il a fait pour les Canadiens à travers le Canada; c'est réellement quelque chose qui prend beaucoup de courage. Ce monsieur, avec beaucoup d'adversité devant lui, a vraiment fait une impression sur ce pays avec les expériences qu'il a vécues à travers son projet qui est si bien fait pour les Canadiens.

On se rappelle justement avant ça M. Terry Fox, qui avait essentiellement essayé la même chose. Il n'a pas eu l'occasion à cause de sa santé, mais on reconnaît l'ouvrage qu'il a fait.

M. Hansen, comme on le sait, s'est impliqué dans beaucoup de projets et beaucoup d'organisations depuis ce temps-là, et a réellement indiqué qu'il est un Canadien qui est fier, qui est préparé à continuer, non seulement après ces épreuves et ce qu'il a fait il y a une dizaine ou une quinzaine d'années, mais à s'impliquer dans la société canadienne.

C'est ça l'important: se réaliser comme Canadiens. Nous avons une responsabilité comme Canadiens de nous impliquer dans nos communautés, de réaliser que chaque citoyen et citoyenne a la capacité de faire de ce pays une meilleure place. M. Hansen, dans cette tradition, continue la tradition de beaucoup de Canadiens avant lui. On va continuer après lui à bâtir la meilleure nation au monde, appelée le Canada.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I would also ask you to recognize some of the distinguished former members, former parliamentarians, who are in the gallery. We have the former Speaker, Hugh Edighoffer, member for Perth, the 32nd through the 34th Parliaments. And more senior than he is Murray Gaunt of Huron-Bruce, from the 26th through the 31st Parliament. Also, Herb Epp of Waterloo North, from the 32nd through the 34th Parliament.

Most of the former members will be here during the day conducting their annual meeting. And from time to time, I hope you will be recognizing them if they're here.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Other members have been recognized previously.

In paying strict attention to the proceedings—first put away the props, member for Nepean-Carleton—it's time for oral questions.

1430

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): I would like to ask a question to the Deputy Premier, but that raised such a controversy yesterday over who the real Deputy Premier was that I'll just refer my question directly to the Premier of Ontario.

On your way into cabinet this morning you were asked a very direct question by one of the media: "Since tax hikes are not going over so well, will you guarantee to the people of this province that they won't go up next year?" You refused to give a definitive "no" to that question, so I'm going to give you an opportunity to give one now.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'm not going to speculate on the contents of next year's budget, or the budget coming after that, or the budget coming after that. But I can tell you that, unlike the previous government, we fully intend to live within our means and we will not be hiding any $6-billion deficits from the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I say to the Premier, six weeks ago, you didn't speculate about the upcoming budget; you told working families in Ontario that there would be no tax increase. You've broken your promise not to raise taxes. You've broken your promise not to hold a public referendum on this big tax grab. Now, after your approval rating has fallen to 9%, lower than Brian Mulroney's ever fell in eight years in office, you've inflicted a huge amount of pain on working families in Ontario. You have made a real career-limiting move to the entire Paul Martin caucus. After having a few hours to think about it, will you now just stand in your place and promise the people of Ontario that you won't dig any deeper into their pockets? Would you do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Something that my friend opposite and his associates have never come to understand: It's not about my career, it's not about Prime Minister Martin's career. It's about the people of Ontario and doing the right thing for them. That's what we're doing through this budget and we're proud to continue on that path.

Mr Baird: It is about working families in Ontario. On January 1, you brought in a $4.2-billion tax grab on our small businesses, on seniors living on fixed incomes, on middle-class families who send their children to independent schools and on employers, those who create jobs. In just a few short weeks you're planning on hitting the middle class with another huge tax increase—a $2.5-billion tax increase. Driver's licences are going up; you're bringing in a new hydro tax; spirits and beer prices will go up; cigarette taxes are going up; and a host of new user fees. You are sticking it to the middle class in such a huge way that they can't cope, they can't handle it. Will you now call this tax grab off and admit that this budget was a complete failure, and will you withdraw it and start from scratch again?

Hon Mr McGuinty: No, we will not withdraw this budget.

Listen, there was a demonstration earlier today by some of those who are opposed to this budget. But I can recall, having been here for some 14 years now, the protests that took place after NDP and Tory budgets. I can recall their regularity, their enthusiasm and their size. I can tell you that by and large, as more and more people come to understand what we are doing for them through this budget, more and more Ontarians are saying, given our financial circumstances, given our priorities—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Member for Nepean-Carleton, I don't want you shouting across when the Premier is responding, or when anyone is responding.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member may not be interested in this, but I think Ontarians are very interested in the news that's flowing from this budget, including the news, for example, recently referenced by the Minister of Health, about our vaccination program and what we're going to do for so many Ontario children. We believe that is an absolutely essential investment if we are going to live up to our obligation to improve the quality of health for Ontarians.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): To the Premier, speaking of the Minister of Health, I'm sure you are aware that your Minister of Health has been out and about around the province speculating on perhaps retracting some of the ideas in the budget with respect to delisting certain services.

He has floated the idea, albeit admittedly by him in his own head, about setting up a health account for $150 to allow people to take their first $150. He's floated that idea in Sudbury. He did say the idea was only in his head, but he is floating those ideas and speaking his mind when he is out around the province.

Do you have any intention whatsoever of changing the provisions in your budget in terms of the policy you've taken about delisting certain services, as obviously your Minister of Health does?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): We stand by the budget as presented.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a question to the Premier. Ian Urquhart reports that Liberal MPPs are getting "more calls on the delistings than on the premiums." Some of them, according to Ian Urquhart, have broken rank and are suggesting that the matter has to be revisited. Particularly in light of the fact that the Minister of Health, who is not a backbencher but a

cabinet minister, is clearly saying to members of his own party at these very public meetings that they should be looking at some way to get out from under the burden of this budget, Premier, why are you ignoring your backbenchers and why are you ignoring your Minister of Health when, in his wisdom, he is understanding that this budget is hurting the people of Ontario?

Interjection: We agree with the "wisdom" part.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Now you're putting me in a tight spot. Let me just say this. Let me tell you how proud I am of the fantastic work that has been done by this Minister of Health in greatly influencing the expenditures we are making through this budget. As a result of his advocacy, his championing medicare in the province of Ontario, we're going to have shorter wait times, more cardiac surgeries, more cataract surgeries, and we've got more vaccinations available for children than ever before. That is the direct result, I am proud to say, of the positive influence of our Minister of Health.

Mr Klees: I have no doubt that the Minister of Health is then particularly disappointed that the Premier is not willing to listen to him on this. But Premier, if you're not willing to listen to your backbenchers or your Minister of Health, will you listen to the hundreds of thousands of people across this province who couldn't be here today but who have sent in their petitions? I am going to ask that pages come and deliver to you petitions from across Ontario. This was presented to me by Linda Leatherdale of the Toronto Sun—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. You had a point of order?

Interjection.

The Speaker: I think your question was finished, actually. Premier?

1440

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to assure my colleague opposite and all Ontarians that we are paying close attention to the response to our budget, but we especially feel a sense of responsibility when it comes to those we are not hearing from; for example, the thousands and thousands of Ontario children who are about to be vaccinated as a result of this budget. We are keeping them in the front of our minds. The 100,000 more Ontarians, overwhelmingly seniors, who are going to receive home care as a result of this budget, we are keeping in the forefront of our minds. The 70,000 seniors who find themselves in Ontario's long-term-care centres, our nursing homes, may not be marching on the front lawn of Queen's Park, but we will not lose sight of our responsibility to them and the improved quality of care that will be available to them as a result of our budget.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Premier, earlier today there were more than a few hundred people demonstrating in front of the Legislature against your budget of broken promises. They are angry because they understand your budget is loaded with unfair and regressive taxes and because you said one thing before the election and did the opposite after the election.

Here is what one person had to say about you and your budget today. This person said, "He owes the people of Ontario an apology for what he did." Premier, will you apologize to Ontarians for what you've done?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'm sure the leader of the third party would understand that the most important thing I can do for the people of Ontario is to ensure that this will never, ever happen again, and we are doing that by means of our Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, which will prevent any future government from hiding a deficit from the people of Ontario. That is the most important thing that we can do for the people of Ontario.

Mr Hampton: Premier, I don't think this person quite agrees with you. She is quite upset at the promise that you've broken. This person is Susan Whelan, Liberal MP for Essex. Now, I suspect the reason that Susan Whelan, Liberal, is upset with you is because she will probably lose her job as a result of your budget. She believes you should apologize for what you've done, and she is not alone. Sarmite Bulte, Liberal MP for Parkdale-High Park, says, "That McGuinty, he really did a number on us."

Premier, will you apologize to all these Liberals who are going to lose their jobs as a result of your budget?

Hon Mr McGuinty: If I only had such power, that the fate of the entire country rested in my hands. It does not.

The motivation for the provisions to be contained within our budget consists of nothing more and nothing less than doing what we think is the right thing to do for the people of Ontario. Given our financial circumstances, we felt that we had a couple of choices. We could have put up our feet for some four years and said that all we were going to do was simply allow further cuts to unfold the way they did for the past eight and a half, or we could make some difficult decisions and call upon the people of Ontario to help us make investments in important public services. That is the choice we made. We are holding ourselves to account to the people of Ontario. We've already set the next election date. There will be no more guessing games in that regard.

The other thing is, we are not using taxpayers' money to spin Ontarians about our budget. We actually believe in our budget, we have confidence in our budget, and we look forward to talking about it more and more.

Mr Hampton: Premier, your failure to apologize and reverse your tax hikes on modest- and middle-income families, and reverse your cuts to OHIP for chiropractors, physiotherapists and optometrists, is destroying not only the credibility of Liberals, it's destroying your credibility. Only 9% of Ontarians believe anything you say any more and they are angry.

Let me give you another example: Janko Peric, Liberal MP for Cambridge, another Liberal who is scared that he's losing his job, has written you a letter calling on you

to reverse your health care premiums. He describes the response he's getting at the door as "anger, anger."

Will you do the right thing for Janko Peric and, most of all, will you do the right thing for all Ontarians and reverse your regressive and unfair tax hikes on working families and stop the cuts to OHIP?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I appreciate the leader of the NDP rising to the defence of my federal cousins. Again, it's not about this particular political party or another particular political party.

I want to tell you about the response made by a parent with respect to our announcement on meningitis vaccinations. This particular parent, Kathryn Blain, is chair of the Meningitis Research Foundation. She lost her son to meningitis some years ago and she had this to say today: "The McGuinty government has demonstrated real leadership by adding the meningococcal and pneumococcal meningitis vaccines on the province's routine immunization schedule. Ontario's move will help ensure that children no longer suffer from the effects of these preventable diseases."

We are very proud of the investment we are making in better health care for all Ontarians, including vaccinations.

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question again is for the Premier. You seem to think that it's only New Democrats and perhaps a few Conservatives who recognize your addiction to promise-breaking, but here is what Yasmin Ratsani, Liberal candidate in Don Valley East, had to say: "McGuinty broke his promises. We voted for him and he broke his promises." This is a Liberal, one of your federal cousins.

Doesn't this cause you to think maybe just for a minute that you have it wrong, that promising before the election, "I will not raise taxes," and then, after the election, raising taxes on the people in Ontario who can afford it the least, and then cutting off their access to chiropractors, physiotherapists and optometrists—don't you think that just maybe they have it right?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The member may want to cast his mind back to their days in government and talk about what happened with respect to public auto insurance. He may want to talk about the social contract and the way people reacted to that.

Interjection.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the member doesn't want to be serious about this, but I do.

We found ourselves in a very difficult situation. As I say, we could have put our feet up for four years, we could have proceeded with cuts the way the previous government had done, but we chose instead to make what we believe are absolutely essential investments in better quality health care and better public education. We stand by those investments. We stand by the commitment we're making on behalf of the people of Ontario to better quality public services.

Mr Hampton: Premier, if you're not prepared to apologize, I think what you're going to face is that you may even see Liberal MPs and candidates on the front lawn of the Legislature, and they won't be here to say, "Thank you, Dalton." They will be here to deliver another message, a message like Borys Wrzesnewkyi, Liberal candidate in Etobicoke Centre, who had this to say: "The McGuinty budget ... that just derailed everything. I think people were really caught off guard.... People were angry ... and I was angry too."

1450

Your own people are angry at you. Don't you understand? There is something fundamentally wrong when you look people in the eye before the election and you say, "I will not raise your taxes," and then immediately after the election you raise taxes on the people who can afford it the least. When you say before the election, "I will not cut health care," and then you cut access to—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. Premier.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Just so we are clear, and I know my friend would not want to leave the wrong impression out there, we are investing, as a result of difficult decisions we are making, an additional $2.2 billion in health care in Ontario. Now, he may not want to accept that, but we've made some difficult decisions. Obviously he doesn't want to support us in terms of the measures we are taking to make those investments. For example, he did not support our bill to roll back corporate tax cuts. He did not support our bill to get rid of the private school tax credit. He did not support our measure to take away the property tax credit from seniors.

Those are difficult decisions we made so that we can make investments in better quality health care. We're proud of making those investments, if only my friend opposite would support those investments and better health care for all Ontarians.

Mr Hampton: I'll tell you what I don't support. I don't support you whacking modest- and middle-income families with a $2-billion tax increase, while you give those poor banks and those impoverished insurance companies a $1-billion tax cut. You're not just hammering Liberals in Ontario. The Deputy Prime Minister, Anne McLellan, in far-off Edmonton, says, "There is no question that the McGuinty budget in Ontario hurt us." But it's not just her, it's Steve Mazurek, Liberal candidate in Leeds-Grenville, who says, "People are mad as hell at Dalton McGuinty."

Would you not admit that it's time you apologized, that it's time you stopped trying to raise the taxes of modest- and middle-income families, while you give insurance companies and banks a $1-billion tax reduction?

Hon Mr McGuinty: No, I don't agree with my friend opposite. I am looking forward to the day when the federal election is over so they might talk about some provincial issues. One of the things we have done, for example—I know my friend opposite will be interested

in hearing this—is we hear from seniors, time and time again, about the particular challenges they face when it comes to cataract surgery, so we've decided by means of our budget to help those seniors who tell us they can't do basic things like read, drive or work on a computer. We don't have provincial waiting time stats in this area right now, but one of the things we're going to do, as a result of the health minister's determination, is begin to collect that information. But we have heard that in one particular hospital, waiting times are now up to close to six months. So what we are doing is we are now funding an additional 9,000 cataract surgeries every year. We think that's good news.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Premier, I need your help. As I travel around the province of Ontario, some people are assigning all the blame to you for breaking your promise not to raise taxes. I know it wasn't all your fault. I know it was Paul Martin who cut health care by $25 billion. I know it was Paul Martin who didn't give you a dime of new funding for health care in his recent budget. Clear up this misunderstanding. Paul Martin says that you didn't tell him about this health care premium, that you didn't tell him about this massive tax grab on Ontario families. Who can the people of Ontario trust? Can they trust the Prime Minister or can they trust you? Would you tell us?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The people of Ontario can trust us to invest $2.2 billion more into their health care.

Mr Baird: What the people of Ontario can't understand is when their Premier says one thing and their Prime Minister says another. Let's look at what Prime Minister Martin said. In interview transcripts which were distributed after your press scrum this morning, here's what the quote said: "Martin also said that he was caught off guard by Ontario's budget. He said Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty gave him no indication that there would be tax hikes, other than the budget would be a tough one."

The people of Ontario believed you when you told him that you gave him a heads-up. They understand that Paul Martin's campaign manager, David Herle, got an untendered contract to help you write and sell that budget.

Premier, would you just come out and tell the people of Ontario that Paul Martin is not being honest with them when he said he didn't know anything about this massive tax grab in the name of health care? Will you do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Gosh, the member is consumed by his responsibilities playing, I guess, a high-profile position in the federal Conservative campaign.

We on this side of the House feel that we've got a responsibility to talk about education and health care and to address environmental issues and the like. So, notwithstanding my friend's continuing obsessive interest with the federal campaign, we will continue to focus on provincial responsibilities, including better health care and better education.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We all woke up this morning, of course, to our Toronto Star. We all opened it up and saw the quotations that were there from you in Ian Urquhart's column and all the ideas you have about blue-skying for this budget.

Your idea looks to me—I have to say, it smacks of a giant smokescreen to get around all of those things you're trying to do: delisting chiropractors, delisting physiotherapists and delisting optometrists. Your answer is that you're going to give everybody a $150 health account. I would put it to you that this is a sign of desperation as you try to get out of this regressive, unfair budget.

I'm asking you, instead of dreaming up this kind of crackpot scheme, why don't you sit down with your cabinet colleagues and do the right thing: admit you've made a mistake and go back and do another budget?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I feel baited when I hear the word "crackpot."

I want to say, in answer to the honourable member's question, that the point that I think is important to make in this discussion is that there is, in our health care system, a series of services which are medically necessary, under the guise of the Canada Health Act, and a variety of others, some of which have received funding and many of which haven't, that are therapeutically beneficial. Chiropractic is one of those, and there are others that were regulated, as an example, under an NDP government, but no funding has been offered to them.

I simply was intending to make the point that across the health care system there are a number of decisions that have been made over time which fund some services which are therapeutically beneficial and not others. I think it was helpful to add that to the debate.

Mr Prue: Back to the minister: Only 11% of the people of Ontario think this budget is a good budget, and only 9% think the Premier is doing a good job. I will put it to you that you cannot float these pie-in-the-sky, non-starter ideas and expect that the people are going to buy them. You first have to come to the conclusion and admit that your budget is an electoral disaster. You have to admit that the twin evils of this budget are the health tax and the delisting.

Once you've admitted that, it's really easy. You've admitted your mistake. You go back, you withdraw the budget, and you convince your cabinet colleagues to do the right thing and do something that's going to work.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I don't think there's any evil to be found in a health premium that's going to give us the capacity in this province to deliver premium health care.

The 2.5 million Ontarians who will benefit in the form of meaningful primary care haven't had a chance to

speak. The 95,000 additional people who will receive services as a result of our expansion of home care haven't had a chance to speak. Where are the voices of those 70,000 residents in beds in long-term-care facilities that, as a result of this budget and the commitments of our government, will see 2,000 new staff serving them and enhancing their quality of care? I haven't heard from them, except perhaps in Markham on Sunday at the opening of Markhaven, where there was extraordinary delight at the realization that this government is committing 191 million new dollars to enhance the quality of care for long-term-care residents—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

Hon Mr Smitherman: —because shortly after we were elected, the word related to long-term care was "crisis." As a result of the work of the member from Nipissing, and the funding provided by that Minister of Finance, our government is moving forward with reforms that will dramatically—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

1500

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. A key goal of our health strategy is to ensure Ontarians are kept healthy. One of the ways this goal can be achieved is through the practice of traditional Chinese medicine, TCM. TCM has been practised for more than 1,000 years and has proven to be an effective method of keeping people healthy and for treating various health ailments. Thus, the demand for traditional Chinese medicine practices has grown tremendously as an alternative to Western medicine. Minister, how does the budget help to move forward our commitment to TCM?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Traditional Chinese medicine stands out as one of those opportunities for Ontarians to have the protection of a regulated service for the provision of something that they, in great numbers, find to be therapeutically beneficial.

I'm pleased to say, as a result of the funding initiatives in the budget, that our government is moving forward to fulfill a campaign commitment we made, which is to move toward the regulation of traditional Chinese medicine. The budget gives us the opportunity to do so, because it gives us the funding necessary to begin to work with all of the affected parties, to be able to move forward with legislation to regulate traditional Chinese medicine.

Mr Wong: Residents of Ontario have indicated that they would like to encourage wider accessibility and use of TCM to keep Ontarians healthy. However, many are concerned with the safety of such practices if left unregulated.

Minister, will the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care proceed with legislation pertaining to the regulation and control of traditional Chinese medicine to ensure that practices and practitioners maintain high safety standards?

Hon George Smitherman: I think safety is a primary motivation here. Many of us will have been familiar with the story that came out of Montreal some number of months ago that caused concern about the unregulated nature of these practices. This is, in part measure, the motivation.

I give the member the commitment that today we have the capacity to move forward, to work with all of those affected parties and bring forward legislation to this House which will finally regulate traditional Chinese medicine so that the therapeutic benefits of it can be provided to those Ontarians who wish to take advantage of that opportunity, and we assure them that we'll do that in a fashion which provides for their safety first.

PREMIER'S CONDUCT

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Premier. Premier, we've heard a number of references in this House in the past week or so related to polls that show significant disillusionment and distrust with you and with your government with respect to, primarily, the budget, the broken promises and the increased taxes. I also suspect, Mr Speaker, through you to the Premier, that another element of this is your role in this House and what I would suggest borders on contempt for the proceedings in terms of your responses to questions by the opposition.

Interjections.

Mr Runciman: Well, I feel strongly about this.

Interjections.

Mr Runciman: Mr Speaker, may I ask a question without the interference of the Minister of Finance?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr Runciman: The question is, we have never had a fulsome explanation, the people of Ontario have never had a fulsome explanation, with respect to your commitment to call a referendum if you were going to increase taxes. Will you stand on your feet today and give the people of Ontario a clear explanation as to why you feel it's not necessary to—

Interjections.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I've addressed this matter time and time again. The member opposite may not like the answer, but the answer remains the same. We engaged Ontarians in the most extensive pre-budget consultation exercise ever. The other thing which is an important contributing factor here is that we discovered, upon taking over government, a $5.6-billion deficit.

My friend says he's a champion here when it comes to the integrity of this place which we are privileged to serve in, to find ourselves in today. Then why is it that they introduced their budget outside of this legislative precinct over at the Magna operation? This is not a time and a place for this particular individual to lecture us when it comes to respecting the traditions of this Legislature.

Mr Runciman: That's another indication of political rhetoric rather than a straight answer, and that's what we're getting used to with this Premier and this government.

Another broken promise with the Liberal platform where it clearly indicates, "The public should be given the opportunity to comment on any legislation." This is not potential legislation, not possible legislation, but legislation that's tabled in this House. Now we find out that not only are they turning down the opportunity for input through a referendum, but they're not going to allow us to have meaningful hearings on this legislation, this dramatically changing budget. They're not giving the people of Ontario an opportunity to have input. They stand up and talk in this House; we've heard it today; Let's hear from people who don't have a voice. There's the opportunity: public hearings. They will not afford us public hearings. If you really believe in consultation with the public, will you direct your House leader to allow public hearings to occur on your budget?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Sometimes it seems that the only place in the universe where sound travels faster than light is over there. Here's the truth: We are going to hold public hearings. That may come as news to the member opposite, but we are going to hold public hearings.

The other thing is that I want to remind the member opposite—and I've got a copy of the Hansard report—that on June 27, 2002, Bob Runciman voted in favour of breaking the Taxpayer Protection Act. There was no referendum; there were no public hearings, no referendum. I just thought the public might be interested in knowing that.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent for four weeks of public hearings to be put out on this budget bill. Could I get that?

The Speaker: That's not a point of order. New question.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question again is back to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I'm asking you to take a very close look at your musings today in the Toronto Star. Your plan is to give every single Ontarian an amount of $150 for services that you, in fact, are going to delist. Just do the math in your head for a minute. Of the 12 million people in Ontario who are covered by OHIP, at $150 each, it's a potential cost of $1.8 billion. So your plan is to potentially spend $1.8 billion to solve your $200-million problem. That's the way I see it. Perhaps you can explain it yourself. This budget is going downhill. It is driving you and your Liberal cousins in Ottawa close to that political point of oblivion. I'm asking you again, will you just admit your mistake, cancel the regressive health tax and the disastrous delistings and start over again?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I appreciate the opportunity to have another question from the honourable member so that I may repeat the point I made earlier, which I think is rather helpful: The member wants to refer to some services. I simply make the point that in our province there is a wide range of therapeutically beneficial services. Some have had the advantage of funding through OHIP, and many others have not. I think that's an important point from the article.

On the issue of our budget, let me take the opportunity to say to a member whose constituency includes a very high proportion of seniors that in this budget seniors will find the following advantages: significant efforts to reduce wait times for key surgeries which are very impactful for seniors, like cataract surgery and hip and knee surgery; an additional 95,000—primarily seniors—will receive benefit through our home care as a result of a significant new investment; long-term care, as I mentioned earlier, not just $191 million for existing beds, but more than $200 million to expand by some 3,760 beds the opportunities for people to have good, quality homes. My point simply is that those seniors are going to benefit from our—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

1510

Mr Prue: Although we are very proud of our seniors in Beaches-East York—of course, all of us are—we actually have the lowest number of seniors of any riding in Toronto.

I'd like to go back. I love quotations and I think this minister should do a little reading. I think the person who said it best was Goethe, when he said, "That which is the hardest thing for a man to see is that which is before his very eyes." What you have here is something before your very eyes that you cannot see. The citizens have seen it and the citizens are angry. Your $1.8-billion scheme to hide a $200-million mistake is surely a non-starter. What I'm asking you again is to do the honourable thing: Go back to your cabinet colleagues, tell them that they've made a mistake, admit it, and redo a botched job, redo the budget, reintroduce something that's going to work.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'd like to thank the honourable member for the true expression of his commitment to the seniors in his riding in being able to make the claim boldly and pound his chest and say, "I have fewer than many others." It is the riding that he represents where Judith Leon, such a great advocate for the voice of seniors, has done so much good work, only to be run down by the local member.

I think it's incredibly important to recognize that this is a budget that moves forward on a transformation agenda, that drives more resources to the community level, that diverts the flow of patients to our hospitals by making sure they have access to services that, over the legacy of those two parties while they were in government, have been ignored. Community-based mental health and addiction treatment are an issue that I would have thought the member was a supporter of. Evidence is very clear that from 1992 on, through the legacy of two parties while in government, they did nothing to enhance

the quality of essential services, like the availability to help people with mental health issues at the community level. In our first budget, in trying fiscal times, we're moving forward because we know that these investments are essential to good quality health care.

EDUCATION

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): My question is for the Minister of Education. On April 26, I had the opportunity to meet with Bruce Davis, the Toronto District School Board trustee in ward 3, Etobicoke, and leaders of all the parent councils in each of the schools in this ward. This was the first opportunity I had to speak to them following the Premier's speech detailing our government's commitment to public education. In that meeting the parent councils applauded the Premier's commitment to public education, but they made repeated references to the Rozanski report and whether our financial commitment to public education was going to match our passion. Minister, can you please tell me how our government's commitments, as detailed in the budget, measure up to the transformation program set out by Rozanski?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I thank the member for the question and I appreciate the work she's done, not just in Etobicoke-Lakeshore but in advocating for education, because it's time to do that; it's time for that to happen. In our province there was a welling recognition that our schools were deteriorating. It was conspicuous to members in every part of this province. Yet, even forced, with their backs against the wall, the previous government did not reply at all adequately to those needs. We have a report from Dr Rozanski that received not scant attention but not great response from the government.

I can tell you now, as of the school year that we've announced, that for special education—for years, the previous government left kids with special needs waiting. Dr Rozanski said that $357 million was waiting to be delivered. We have provided now a total of $373 million, more than Dr Rozanski asked for. One of the worst reasons for people struggling in school is not having the language of instruction. Dr Rozanski said there was $90 million needed there to help those kids to get to a level playing field; $93 million has been delivered, in the area of language, in our schools.

Ms Broten: Thank you for your answer, Minister, and most importantly, I also thank you for your commitment to public education. I'm wondering, in practical terms, because I know this is the question I will face from the parents' council representatives when I meet with them again, what changes we will see in classrooms in Etobicoke-Lakeshore. How will the students in Etobicoke-Lakeshore benefit from these specific changes that we will be bringing in place?

Hon Mr Kennedy: In addition to having the personalized attention that can only come with recognizing special needs, with eliminating the language barrier, this economy depends on our receiving new Canadians and having them do well in their schools. They will see smaller class sizes as a result of new investments, over and above the ongoing needs of education. They will see extra help for kids who have challenges because of low income, because of poverty. They will see people getting help to stay in school. We will attack aggressively the dropout rate. Yesterday we announced a total of 71 million new dollars, and $60 million being put to better use to make sure we have fewer kids dropping out.

Overall, in this one year alone, we invested double what the previous government did toward Dr Rozanski's recommendations. By the end of the fall we will more than exceed the investment that's needed—not that much to do with Dr Rozanski; to do with kids out there who have been made to wait for their futures. Some of them have been compromised, and I'm pleased to tell the honourable member that that ends with our government, and what does begin is a better future for every student in this province.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Premier. The poll yesterday which shows an approval rating of only 9% and the flood of letters and e-mails and faxes that continue to come into our office continue to show that Ontarians are very unhappy. They're angry. They're frustrated by the budget with its health tax and the delisting of services.

I have an e-mail here from a health care worker called Carole, who says, "I have been a long-time Liberal supporter. Your announcement of the new health premium and the simultaneous delisting of such services as physiotherapy and eye exams has been the final straw. You have lost my support and that of my colleagues and acquaintances." Carole and others like her wonder why they should pay your regressive, hefty health tax while being denied OHIP coverage for eye exams, physiotherapy and chiropractic services.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the member opposite would have taken advantage of the opportunity to have discussions with her constituent to let her know exactly what we're doing with respect to those particular delistings.

I also know she would appreciate, as a former Minister of Health, that when I got here 14 years ago the health budget consumed about one third of the global budget and now it's close to one half. So we've got to decide exactly how it is we're going to put the brakes on the growth in expenditures when it comes to health care.

What we have done is made some difficult decisions with respect to these delistings, but we're also adding another $2.2 billion into health care; all with a view to getting better results, whether it's wait times, more vaccinations and the like.

I'm sure the member opposite will want to convey that to her constituent.

Mrs Witmer: I can tell you, Premier, that Ontarians feel very betrayed that you broke your promise.

I have another letter here from a person by the name of Greg, and he writes:

"You say the reason you raised taxes is because you didn't have the money to support the budget plan. Well, I have no more money to give you, so what am I supposed to do? Go further into debt? As I've already advised, if I'm forced into debt, then all I will do is declare bankruptcy, so no one wins. Not a very pretty picture, is it? So why," he asks, "are you doing this to the people of Ontario?"

I ask you, what do you say to people like Greg, to seniors and to others who simply don't have the money to afford your new health tax?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The first thing we say to people who follow these matters closely is that never again will they have this kind of shenanigan foisted upon them by way of a hidden budgetary deficit. That's not going to happen again, because we're changing the law in Ontario to make sure it doesn't.

The other thing the member opposite is not prepared to convey to her constituents, obviously, is the good news that is coming out of this budget with respect to the improvements in the quality of health care that are going to be made for the people of Ontario: 9,000 more cataract surgeries every year. We're increasing the number of cardiac procedures by more than 36,000. We're providing 2,340 additional joint replacements every year. We're going to perform another 425 extra organ transplants per year. We're going to expand dialysis treatments by 529,000 annually. Those are just some of the things that we are going ahead with as a result of the difficult decisions we've made to invest in health care for all Ontarians.

1520

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Premier. I've had a look at your budget bill. Since you claim that every penny raised from the premium is going to health care, Ontarians, including myself, expected to find a dedicated fund in your budget bill. But there is no such thing there. Premier, only 11% of Ontarians think your budget is on track when it comes to health care. Can you promise the people of Ontario that if and when you finally get around to introducing legislation enabling your unfair and regressive health tax, there will be a fund dedicated only to health?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the Minister of Finance would like to speak to this.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): My friend from Hamilton East, as she becomes more familiar with the procedures of this House, will know that very soon estimates will be presented in this Legislature. Those estimates will show exactly the revenues that will be raised from all aspects of the budget that we presented.

More importantly, it will show that every single cent that we raise with the Ontario health premium will be spent in additional health care services. This is the money that will give us better home care, better community care. We'll begin to transform primary care. We'll provide vaccinations for young children. We'll do more for the 100,000 people who, under this budget, will for the first time have access to primary care through a family health team. We're very proud of those expenditures, and very proud of the fact that every single penny of the health premium will be invested in better health care in this province.

Ms Horwath: Minister, the question is, why don't you level with the people of Ontario? People don't trust your government at all. That's why they want to see exactly what you're going to do with this middle-class tax grab. They've had enough of the broken promises. They want to see the details of the bill that imposes the regressive and unfair taxes. Why don't you show us the bill directly? Why don't you want the people to see exactly what's there, or what's not there?

Hon Mr Sorbara: The wonderful thing about the budget I presented is that for the first time we have introduced—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Perhaps I'll just do this between you and me, sir. I'm not sure they want to hear.

For the first time ever we've introduced a bill entitled the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, which will require our government to report quarterly to the people of this province and its Legislature on all our expenditures. For the first time ever a government is going to present—and this will happen this fall—detailed expenditures for the four years between now and when the next election is called. For the first time ever this government will be required to present audited financial statements to the people of Ontario before an election so that all political parties can have equal access to the same information.

NORTHERN MEDICAL SCHOOL

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a question for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. During the election campaign, we made an important commitment to the Northern Ontario Medical School. Minister, I was in Espanola yesterday, in Elliot Lake a couple of days before. People are asking about the progress of the Northern Ontario Medical School. Could you report to this House on our progress?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I do think that the Northern Ontario Medical School is something that we all celebrate. I'd like to take the opportunity to inform the House that we congratulate—

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): We announced it.

Hon Mr Smitherman: Yes, you announced it. Like many other things you announced, you didn't fund it. We funded it.

We offer our congratulations to Dean Roger Strasser. We know the group putting together the curriculum for this school has been working enormously hard and that the Liaison Committee of Medical Education has recently issued the decision to accredit this new medical school.

We committed $95.3 million; construction is initiated on two campuses. We're going to see the first students coming to classes in Sudbury and in Thunder Bay in August 2005. This means more doctors for Ontario, more budding new doctors given the opportunity to experience the extraordinary flavour of northern Ontario. I already know anecdotally from members and from northern communities that they're seeing the effect and benefit of more doctors wanting to take up practice in northern Ontario.

Mr Brown: The shortage of doctors in our area is critically important to all of my constituents. I want you to further elaborate on the situation in northern Ontario where the small communities of northern Ontario, in particular, find the shortage of doctors to be very, very difficult in that circumstance. Could you help us with that, Minister?

Hon Mr Smitherman: We went one step further to correct the mess that the previous government left behind that imperilled the future of the Northern Ontario Medical School. That is that the Premier and I, working with the local members, went to the communities of Thunder Bay and Sudbury to make sure that those two significant regional hospitals are financially viable and, in the case of Sudbury, that it is even completed.

Why are we so supportive of this initiative? Why are we so dead certain that we must make sure that it succeeds? Because we know that if given the opportunity to train in northern communities, communities long since underserviced, these doctors will stay in the north and provide benefit in communities like Blind River, Chapleau, Espanola and so many other great communities across the north.

That's why I'm so pleased to say that this commitment remains at the top of our list with respect to delivering better health care to northern Ontario. It stands as an important link to the economic viability of those communities.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Premier, only 9% of the people in the province believe you. It's really no wonder because, from the very beginning, you somehow have an inability or an unwillingness to simply answer the most straightforward questions that are put to you. With regard to the health care premium, yesterday and again today your finance minister refused, for some unknown reason, to agree in this House to establish a dedicated fund for the health care premium.

People are not believing you when you say, "Take me at my word that every penny will go to health care." It's a simple matter. Why won't you just simply agree to establish a dedicated fund for those health care taxes?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Minister of Finance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'm not sure if my friend from Oak Ridges does not have time to actually read the budget papers, but if he would take the time, I would direct him to page 43 and page 44 of budget paper A, which sets out in very specific detail what the Ontario health premium will be spent on this year. If he goes to these papers, he will also see that every single year hereafter, the Ontario health premium will be itemized. The expenditures that are made with the resources that premium brings will be itemized in budgets from here on in this province.

Mr Klees: I have read the budget notes. I have read his document. I also read his campaign document. I also read the commitments that he and his Premier made coming into this election. We couldn't believe a word of that document. So how does the Minister of Finance expect us now, or anyone in the province, to believe anything that is in that document?

We're simply saying, look, no one in the province believes you any more. Put this into legislation. Forget your document. If you believe in your document, why won't you entrench it in legislation? Give us a dedicated fund, and perhaps then we may start to believe you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Let's just talk about who's putting out what document. It was the date of the quarterly report of the Ontario finances, which came out on August 12, 2003—this was less than two months before election day—put out by that party when they were in government. I repeat, it was less than two months before election day. It said that there was a balanced budget in the province of Ontario. The election took place on October 2. Within a month of that election, Erik Peters, the former Provincial Auditor, said that there was a $5.6-billion deficit in this province. How can you blow $6 billion in less than two months? That's what they put up.

1530

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, will you agree that early detection of disease is the best thing for the patient and at less cost to our health care system?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to thank the member for his endorsement of our family health team proposal, which is based on the principle that by providing a multidisciplinary approach of health practitioners working together, we can not only provide for people's illness but make certain, in a primary health care setting with 150 family health teams coming to provide care to 2.5 million Ontarians, that we should be able to dramatically enhance our capacity to assist people in staying well in the first place.

Mr Bisson: Minister, that was a bit of a cute answer, but you didn't answer the question. The question, simply put, was, do you agree that early detection of disease is the best thing for the patient and is cheaper for our health care system? You chose not to answer.

So the supplementary part of the question is, there is a woman in Kapuskasing who says that if she had been in the situation today of having to go to her eye doctor after this budget had been introduced, she wouldn't have gone. As a result of early detection, they detected a cancer behind her eye and they were able to treat it some four years ago. She's saying, with your budget, she wouldn't have gone to the eye exam. Do you think that's dangerous for the public and that finally you'll admit that your policy is going to be dangerous for the public of Ontario when it comes to their health services?

Hon Mr Smitherman: Do you know what I think is dangerous for the public? The fact that when your party was in government, you cut the production line of new doctors to the point that while you were the government, we went from having 55 underserviced communities to well over 130. That's what I think is dangerous to the public. As a result, that's why we celebrate the Northern Ontario Medical School, and that's why we celebrate a model of primary care reform in our province that will, once and for all, bring medical practitioners together in a wide variety, a multidisciplinary approach to make sure that people have all the care they require.

PETITIONS

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I have a petition today to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Brock township has been declared an underserviced area by the Ministry of Health with respect to physician services since 1996; and

"Whereas a CHC in Brock township could provide a range of community-based health and social services provided by a multidisciplinary team including physicians, nurse practitioners, nutritionists, health promotion coordinators, social workers, counsellors and other health professionals needed in our local community;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Brock CHC proposal submitted on February 27, 2003, be funded as recommended by the district health council."

Signed by many people from my riding.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Minister of Finance and the Dalton McGuinty government presented their four-year Plan for Change on May 18, 2004, in this Legislature;

"Whereas the 2004-05 budget commits to an increase of $2.2 billion for improvements to public health care; and

"Whereas this plan includes the establishment of 150 family health teams, home care for an additional 95,700 Ontarians, expansion of mental health services to serve an additional 78,600 patients, nine new MRI/CT sites, $156 billion for free pneumonia, meningitis and chicken pox vaccinations for children, and more doctors and nurses;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support the Minister of Finance and the Dalton McGuinty government's Plan for Change and pass budget legislation as soon as possible so that health care can be improved for all Ontarians."

As I agree with this petition, I affix my name to it.

EVENING SCHOOL BUS SERVICE

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty has promised to make the needs of students a priority for his government and that students deserve to have a bright future with a good education; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty has promised not to give up on students or Ontario's public school system;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government work with the Simcoe County District School Board to establish an evening bus route from St Joan of Arc High School in Barrie to the outlying communities. This would allow students to participate in extracurricular activities and help them to fulfill their potential, secure a bright future and receive the best educational experience possible as promised to them by the Premier."

I want to thank Clinton Ignatov, who has been circulating this petition and spearheading the drive for an after-hours bus to help his classmates, himself and his family. I've signed the petition.

AJAX-PICKERING HOSPITAL

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition addressed to the Parliament of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas at the time the Centenary Health Centre and Ajax-Pickering hospitals amalgamated under the umbrella of the Rouge Valley Health System, a commitment was made by the Health Services Restructuring Commission that the communities of Whitby/Pickering/Ajax, according to the amalgamation agreement, would not lose a full-service hospital and would maintain all existing services; and

"Whereas municipal governments in the region of Durham have provided financial support to the Rouge Valley Health System on the understanding that Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service hospital; and

"Whereas numerous service clubs and other organizations have also raised money in support of the expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital and services provided therein such as the maternity unit on the understanding that the Ajax-Pickering hospital would continue as a full-service facility; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health System has changed its strategic plan without consulting its key stakeholders, such as the residents who use the hospital, the doctors, nurses and other professional staff that work within the system and the local governments and organizations that fund the hospital; and

"Whereas this has led to a decrease in the level of service provided by the maternity unit and the number of acute care beds;

"We, the undersigned concerned citizens of west Durham, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That a full-service hospital with all the existing services at the time of amalgamation be maintained at the Ajax-Pickering site and new services added as the population continues to grow and age, as agreed to by the Ajax-Pickering General Hospital and Centenary Health Centre in the amalgamation agreement signed May 31, 1998."

Since I agree, I put my signature to it.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Liberal government has announced in their budget that they are delisting key health services such as routine eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reverse the delisting of eye exams, chiropractic and physiotherapy services and restore funding for these important and necessary services."

I sign my name in full agreement.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition today on access to trades and professions in Ontario. It's signed by, among others, some Mississauga residents who are finalists in the Canada Wide Science Fair, held in Newfoundland. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who have chosen to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry or re-entry of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I'm pleased to sign it and ask Brendan to carry it down for me.

1540

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Brock township has been declared an underserviced area by the Ministry of Health with respect to physician services since 1996; and

"Whereas a CHC in Brock township could provide a range of community-based health and social services provided by a multidisciplinary team including physicians, nurse practitioners, nutritionists, health promotion coordinators, social workers, counsellors and other health professionals needed in our local community;

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Brock CHC proposal submitted on February 27, 2003, be funded as recommended by the district health council."

TTC RIGHT-OF-WAY

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I keep getting petitions advising us against the dedicated TTC right-of-way. It reads as follows:

"To the Parliament of Ontario and Minister of the Environment ...

"Whereas an environmental assessment (EA) is underway on St Clair Avenue West to study potential transit improvements, including the possibility of installing a dedicated TTC right-of-way;

"Whereas the consultation process so far has been in bad faith, top-down and rushed, which has disappointed and angered the local community almost entirely, and not been up to any acceptable public standards;

"Whereas comments by the chair and the members of the Toronto Transit Commission have made it clear that there is a predetermined outcome to the EA process, regardless of the objections of the local community;

"Whereas a dedicated ROW would force significantly more traffic on to our local streets;

"Whereas safety must be a high priority for any alternative selected and, according to the ambulance and fire department staff, they don't like to work with rights-of-way;

"Whereas a ROW would lead to the reduction or elimination of on-street parking on St Clair Avenue West; ...

"Whereas the ROW will have substantial negative economic effects on local business;

"Whereas there is no guarantee that a dedicated ROW will improve transit service substantially as the number of streetcars serving the street will actually be reduced;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, strongly urge the Minister of the Environment to order a full environmental assessment on St Clair Avenue West, one that genuinely consults and takes into consideration the views and opinions of the local community."

Since I agree wholeheartedly with this petition, I affix my name to it.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I affix my name in full support.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a petition signed by over 600 people—two at a time, I might add, and not all on one sheet.

"To the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas the current method of allocating municipal tax revenues to the taxpayer by property tax based on current market value has the following unwanted characteristics:

"(1) The tax burden varies subject to the desirability of a location, making taxes unpredictable and difficult to budget for;

"(2) The relative market value of a property is subjective and variable and subject to disagreement;

"(3) Long-time residents on fixed incomes in particular are affected, causing hardship, but this problem also affects young families;

"(4) Neighbourhood instability is increased as house sales are accelerated beyond the normal rate of neighbourhood renewal;

"(5) Residents who have done no home improvements pay increased taxes because of new higher cost development in a neighbourhood, out of their control, and perceive this as unfair;

"(6) Widely different property taxes caused by market value pay for equivalent services for each resident, without any apparent conscious policy social good and regardless of ability to pay...;

"(7) Long-standing policy exempts the sale of a principal residence from capital gains tax, yet current value assessment effectively contradicts this, causing a prepaid capital gains penalty, based on a latent value which may never be realized;

"(8) Resentment in one part of a community that it is paying more than its fair share can lead to division and other socially undesirable effects; and

"Whereas these undesirable effects, which are sufficient reason on their own for our petition, are exacerbated by the increased reliance on the property tax to fund a greater range of government programs as instituted by the former government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"To change the method of property assessment so that it becomes based on objective criteria, using a formula such as lot size in conjunction with building total exterior dimensions, and removes the location and desirability factor from the calculation."

It's a petition I agree with, and I affix my name thereto.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It concerns the support for chiropractic services under Ontario's health insurance plan.

"Whereas elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need; and

"Whereas those with reduced ability to pay, including seniors, low-income families and the working poor, will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments; and

"Whereas elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"Whereas there was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I affix my signature, as I totally agree with this petition.

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have more petitions to keep Muskoka part of northern Ontario. I have about 3,000 and counting, so far. This says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the district of Muskoka is currently designated as part of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the geography and socio-economic conditions of Muskoka are very similar to the rest of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the median family income in the district of Muskoka is $10,000 below the provincial average and $6,000 below the median family income for greater Sudbury; and

"Whereas removing the district of Muskoka from northern Ontario would adversely affect the hard-working people of Muskoka by restricting access to programs and incentives enjoyed by residents of other northern communities; and

"Whereas the residents of Muskoka should not be confused with those who cottage or vacation in the district; and

"Whereas the federal government of Canada recognizes the district of Muskoka as part of the north; and

"Whereas this is a mean-spirited and politically motivated decision on the part of the McGuinty government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government maintain the current definition of northern Ontario for the purposes of government policy and program delivery."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Mr Bryant moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 86, An Act to amend the Election Act, the Election Finances Act, the Legislative Assembly Act and the Representation Act, 1996 to provide for provincial general elections at intervals of approximately four years, to govern the timing of writs, close of nominations and polling day, to make modifications relating to the electoral readjustment process, and to make technical amendments / Projet de loi 86, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, la Loi sur le financement des élections, la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi de 1996 sur la représentation électorale en vue de prévoir la tenue des élections générales provinciales à intervalles d'environ quatre ans, de régir le calendrier relatif à l'émission des décrets, à la clôture du dépôt des déclarations de candidature et au jour du scrutin, et d'apporter des modifications au processus de révision électorale ainsi que des modifications de forme.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Bryant.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I'm honoured to rise today to speak to this historic bill. I'll be sharing my time with the members for Scarborough Southwest, Etobicoke North, Perth-Middlesex and Sarnia-Lambton. This bill, for the first time in the history of Ontario, and for one of the first times in the history of the Commonwealth, does something that is completely in the public interest, and yet, I realize, may not be in the short-term political interest of the incumbent governing party or any party in particular.

1550

This bill fixes the election dates on a four-year calendar cycle so that everybody in the province of Ontario—everybody—knows when the next election is going to be. The bill is not just about the next election, October 4, 2007; it's about all elections after that as well. It's about setting elections for the next 100 years or more in the province of Ontario.

That means establishing a bill that has a structure that, among other things, permits for the constitutional requirements, permits for certainty, provides discretion to the chief electoral officer and addresses a number of additions that were acquired over time.

Obviously, I think all of us in this chamber are very grateful for all the great work that Elections Ontario does. This will create greater certainty for Elections Ontario; there's no doubt about it. Elections Ontario likes to know far in advance when the next election is. They can get all those polling stations set up, they can hire the people who will be working in the polling stations, they can

ensure that everybody is ready to go, well in advance, for the advance polls and for everything that has to happen in the writ period.

I think we in this House also agree and are very grateful for all the work that people do in volunteering their time working for Elections Ontario and participating in this democratic process. They don't help out one party or another party or one candidate or another candidate. They are there to assist our democratic process.

We are here today to do the same thing. This Legislature has an opportunity to debate and, if it receives the confidence of the House, pass a law that is going to give everybody, no matter what the voter's traditional support is, greater confidence in our electoral system. All of us in this House will have an opportunity to say to our constituents and to all voters across Ontario, (1) "We want you to get out and participate, to get out and vote," and (2), "We want you to have confidence in your democratic system, and we feel that one way we can do that is to provide the certainty of a four-year election cycle."

This is not only going to provide certainty for Elections Ontario, which is very important, but it's going to provide economic certainty as well. There's no doubt that with respect to some elections there is uncertainty as to what will happen at the end of the election. In the pre-writ period there is uncertainty around which party may form the next government. That uncertainty, at times, creates economic uncertainty.

This will permit people to govern their affairs and understand exactly what the mandate of a particular government is. To that end, governments will know; I don't just mean members of this House, but governments will know what their agenda is and what their mandate is and what their timetable is—no guessing as to whether this or that project has to be completed by winter, spring or fall, as we've seen in past elections.

If you talk to anybody who has served in government they'll tell you that around the time of an election, in the months around the time an election might be called, there is enormous uncertainty as to what they can or can't get done. They don't know when that writ is going drop. They have no idea. That kind of uncertainty is not in the public interest. It's not. It means that governments have to operate with a number of contingencies, unaware of whether or not the Premier of the day will make that walk to the Lieutenant Governor's office and drop the writ.

It removes the uncertainty that comes from the snap election call. It removes the uncertainty that comes from a particularly elongated mandate. It provides greater public confidence in the democratic and electoral system. It provides greater confidence and certainty as to how the government is going to complete its operations. Certainly it provides greater certainty to the people who work in this building—in Queen's Park—and to the people who work at that table in front of me too. There's no guessing. Pages will have more certainty. This is good for the pages too—greater certainty. There will be no guessing as to when you're coming back or not coming back. It's good for the pages—the pages are cheering.

In addition to that, of course, you'll have voters who understand that an election is not being called because it may or may not be the most opportune time for the Premier of the day. The election is not being called because at that particular time it's in the political interests of the incumbent governing party. The election is not being called as some kind of tactic—it's not being called too early; it's not being called too late. Why is the election being called? The election is being called because, if passed, that's the law of Ontario.

Now, of course we'd have to literally amend the constitution if we were going to entrench that election date, because right now there are, in fact, conventions and constitutional laws that govern the calling of elections. Of course, in the event of a minority government, if the confidence of the House could not be established, the Lieutenant Governor would be able to call an election, and the way this law would work is that it would provide certainty thereafter, because you would go back to that four-year cycle. In other words, if in 20 years a minority government election was called and it happened in February, it would not mean that thereafter in Ontario we have elections in February; it would revert to October.

This bill is part of a democratic renewal package that, it is my hope, can earn the support of all parties and all members of this House, because the fundamental purpose of it, and the mandate of the secretariat for democratic renewal, is to give people more confidence in their electoral system. The idea is not only to improve the institutions themselves, so part of the democratic renewals agenda is parliamentary reform.

My fabulous parliamentary assistant Caroline Di Cocco, the member for Sarnia-Lambton, is working with the government House leader and the government House leader's counterparts, and working with the existing reports on greater empowerment of MPPs, and over time she will be meeting with every MPP who is interested in this issue, because we want to take our time and get this right so that people can have greater confidence in the way this House works. That's improvement to the institution itself. And yes, I guess we're changing an institution; that is, elections and the calling of elections.

Part of the democratic renewal agenda is also to have an electoral reform process whereby we will go to the people, not unlike they went to the people in Ontario, to seek their advice on what the alternatives should be in a referendum that would change our electoral system here in Ontario.

In addition to that, we want to give people confidence in our campaign finance system, so that people feel the democratic system is working as it should. Some of these things are institutions, but the purpose, ultimately, is not just to reform the institutions themselves. We don't want to have democracy boil down to nothing more than a set of hollow democratic institutions that don't have real meaning to the people of Ontario, or Canada for that matter. Democracy is primarily a hope and a demand. For a time, democracy fought for freedom, individual freedoms. For a time, democracy's main focus was the social

justice project, in addition to fighting for those freedoms, and of course we continue to do so now. But today, perhaps democracy's greatest challenge, at least in the province of Ontario, is dealing with the evil of the civic malaise, the distrust of democratic processes, the distrust of matters democratic. The rush, in part, towards the non-governmental organizations; the rush, in part, to all of the alternative Internet voices for the people of Ontario and for the people of Canada and the world, and the rush toward the globalism movement, in part, is a step away from our existing institutions.

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Even as provincial government and the Legislature remain outside the family, for most people it's the most important secular institution in their lives. It collects their taxes, spends money on their social system, on their health care and their education. The provincial government responsibilities today and their pre-eminence in Confederation, is not, I think, what the Fathers of Confederation imagined at the time. I don't think they could ever have imagined what would become of what is now our social safety net. I don't think they ever could have imagined how important, for example, regulation and jurisdiction over the environment and energy would have been. It is truly an accident of history, for example, that a topic as important as energy, that cries out for co-ordination, is a provincial responsibility. Each province has its own responsibility and its own set of circumstances, geographic and otherwise.

We have the provincial government—and certainly in Ontario it is true—playing such an important role in people's lives. That is why we must engage people in matters of government, legislative and democratic, so people feel that they have confidence in this democratic system, that they have confidence not only in these institutions but in the people who make them work, so that this incredibly important thing that is Queen's Park and opposition and government, the Legislature and MPPs and the public service, is seen as something that they should have confidence in.

The Democratic Renewal Secretariat's goal is to give people confidence in that, in those institutions, in those people, in those principles. That means, amongst other things, that the incumbent governing party that makes these changes—and in that case, it is the McGuinty government that is introducing these change, pursuant to our commitments to make government work better for people—has got to face the reality, as we do, that we may bring forth democratic reforms that are in the public interest and are in the interests of addressing and curing the civic malaise, that do give people greater confidence in matters electoral, legislative, government, and otherwise, that do engage more people, particularly young people, who are that next generation of leaders that right now is a generation totally disenchanted with what are sometimes called "traditional institutions" of democracy, the only institutions of democracy that play this critical role that I described before that the provinces and the federal government play.

We may do all those things in the public interest, give people greater confidence in the system, greater empowered and enfranchised voters, currently, formally, informally, officially, illegally, or otherwise, not participating in the system. We may do that and give people greater confidence in the system, and do it in a fashion that is not to our political benefit. I think it is the test of a government and a Legislature that it will put that public interest ahead of one's own particular interest. I have confidence that this House is the House that can do that.

We have in government people who've served in government before. But also, of course, the majority of the government caucus has not only not served in government before but has not served in the Legislature before.

Fresh ideas and not just doing things the way things have always been done are within the government caucus. The official opposition caucus, yes, has new members. But you have a number of members who have served in government before and know how it works. The same, of course, applies to the third party. There is a wealth of experience on how this place should work, has worked before and ought to work in the future.

It is an opportunity now for all those ideas and all those reforms that we kicked around and talked about but never moved on to finally happen. That's the purpose of the Democratic Renewal Secretariat. That's the agenda of this government when it comes to democratic renewal. It is not a political or partisan agenda. It is about improving democracy. It is about trying our best to cure the evil that is the civic malaise, that is apathy, that is those who have lost confidence in our democratic systems. I hope we can do it in a non-partisan fashion, but we're certainly going to pursue it regardless. This is just the beginning of great things for our democratic system from all sides of this House.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I want to congratulate the minister on bringing forward this piece of legislation. It's a significant shift in the way that we will govern here in Ontario, and it sends a very strong signal to people in Ontario that this government is serious about engaging the public in future elections.

By setting a fixed date three and a half years from now, we are telling the people of Ontario, "Here is the election date. It's a set date in 2007." It's a date that will be advertised and known to all, and it's a date that people can get engaged in, or before. I think about students in schools who in the last election didn't really have an opportunity to get too involved. The writ was dropped by the then Premier, Mr Eves. I think it was around September 1. An election was held a month later, on October 2. There wasn't much of an opportunity to debate issues, to discuss what the government had done and what the government was planning to do if it got re-elected. It also made it difficult for the opposition parties to get involved and to really bring forward their platforms in that short, one-month period. With this new legislation, election campaigning, in a way, begins today. People can know that there's an election coming up three

and a half years from now and they can get involved in that process.

I also want to talk briefly about this institution, this parliamentary chamber. I've been a city councillor since 1988. I was elected last October and I had the pleasure to come into this House and to start learning how this Legislature, or this assembly, works. It's very different from city hall. I realized very quickly in the first few months that this institution, this assembly, is really outdated. It has great tradition and great employees and people who are really dedicated to doing the best for Ontario, but it is extremely archaic and out of date.

Oliver Cromwell, back in England in the 1600s, if I'm not mistaken, made the last significant change to Parliament when he removed a lot of the powers from the sovereign and brought them into the House of Commons in England. Since then, the system has stayed basically the same: We have opposition sitting on one side, the government on the other; debate takes place; a Speaker is in the chair; and votes are taken throughout the session.

I think it's time, long overdue, that that system from the 1600s be updated. Look at any other area of society: In transportation, we no longer use horse and carriage; in communication, we no longer use outdated communication systems. It's changed and modernized tremendously in the last 50 or 25 years. Look at other systems, such as our health system. Many of the procedures used by doctors and hospitals 200 or 300 years ago are archaic, are gone, have been changed, but this parliamentary system that we have remains the same. It remains the same way it was basically in the 1600s.

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It cannot be changed overnight, but I think a significant step is being made by bringing forward Bill 86 because, by bringing forward this bill and by fixing an election date, you are removing the power from the Premier of the day to say, "I think I'll call an election when I feel like it," in a certain period of time. As the law presently stands, a Premier can get up in the morning, take a look out the window, take a look at the weather and say, "You know what? I think I'll call an election," take a walk down the hall, go and see the Lieutenant Governor and say to the Lieutenant Governor, "I want to dissolve this assembly and call an election."

In some ways, it's advantageous to certain individuals, particularly the Premier of the time who does that, because usually he or she is popular and is in a position of getting re-elected. We're now saying, take that out of the hands of the Premier and put it as a fixed date that applies to the Legislative Assembly as a whole. It's a first step in what the Attorney General has pointed out in his remarks earlier toward a broader change or a broader democratic renewal of this assembly and of the way we govern ourselves here in Ontario.

This, to me, is another promise fulfilled. I'm sure the opposition members are going to stand up and say, "This doesn't go far enough," or, "It's not the real promise you made," or, "You should do more than you're doing," or, "You should do less than you're doing," but I recall as a candidate campaigning on this issue and saying that if we were elected, we would bring in fixed election dates. We're delivering that today.

I also wanted to bring forward the fact that with the 28-day period that I mentioned earlier—there is so little interest in the election that we've seen that we've had shorter and smaller turnouts at election time. We've reached the point, I think, of just over 50% of the public voting. I think that by fixing the date and by bringing forward other renewals in the next few years or in the next few months, we will see that more of the public will get involved.

Elections are important. Elected representatives are important. They make decisions that affect everyone in this province. All sorts of legislation has been brought forward in the past several months by this government which has affected all sorts of people right across Ontario; lasting, strong changes, such as the increase in the minimum wage and the freezing of insurance rates. These are all decisions that are made in this room that we sit in together. We really need to look at the way we do our business, the way this place conducts business.

It was funny because recently I had the opportunity to speak with an American who was in Toronto. He was saying he turned on the TV late at night and saw a replay of this assembly, and he asked me, "What's all the yelling and screaming about? What are you guys doing in there? What goes on in the Legislative Assembly? I can't figure it out." There are a lot of people out there who do tune in and watch—if they do tune in and watch at all, besides my father and my family—who would probably say, "What's going on in the Legislative Assembly?"

It's difficult at times to follow the debate, difficult to follow the discussion and difficult to follow the decisions that are being made. We need to change that. We need to truly engage the public. We need to pull this institution out of the 1600s and bring it into the year 2004. We need to get young people, seniors, people with families, all different people who otherwise would not get involved fully, into this system. We need to have them have a voice.

In Australia they have mandatory voting. I think that if they don't vote there, they're given a penalty of some type.

Interjection: A fine.

Mr Berardinetti: A fine of some type. I don't think we need to go that route, but I truly think that legislation of this type, which fixes election dates, and future legislation which will be brought forward by our minister, which changes this institution, will engage the public, will bring people forward and will involve the public in the everyday decisions that affect them all here in Ontario.

I want to wrap up with that and let the next speaker continue on from there.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): Speaker, with your permission, I'd like to address my remarks contoured by three broad headings: democracy, not gamesmanship; new Canadians; and schools and universities.

Before beginning each of these particular subheadings, I'd like to start with a quotation from the realm of politics, from the realm of political history, for each of these.

I'd like to start by quoting a former Vice-President and President of the United States—a Tory, I might add—Gerald Ford, who said, "The political lesson of Watergate is this: Never again must America allow an arrogant, elite guard of political adolescents to bypass the regular party organization and dictate the terms of a national election."

I bring this to your attention with a view to the first subheading I've cited: democracy, not gamesmanship.

One of the very remarkable things that we in the government of Ontario, a McGuinty-led government, are doing is ceding, relinquishing, giving up one of the great powers that a government, a Premier, in this province has had for Ontario's entire history: the timing of an election, be it based on the mood of the electorate, the economy, the way the United States' GDP is flowing or their latest involvement in either engaging the world in war or disengaging themselves, and also based even on polling that would be done Ontario-wide, which is being done in great measure these days, as you will realize, with the federal election underway.

That is a magnificent opportunity for an incumbent government to play games, to structure the timing of the election, to call it when they might perceive the opposition would be most unready, when they would be most caught off guard, which until this bill, this initiative, this move for democratic renewal, has been the gamesmanship that Ontario has had to suffer. You'll recall that there have been governments in this province that have gone to the polls earlier than the accepted four-year mandate and governments that have gone to the polls later than that, perhaps in their fifth year. That power to work around Ontarians, to be poll-driven, is now going to be eliminated for the first time, certainly in this province, but I might also add, very nobly, for the first time in the history of most of the Commonwealth countries on the planet.

As the Premier of this province has said, "Elections do not belong to Premiers to use as they see fit for their own political agenda." That is a remarkable effort on the part of this government toward a broader democratic renewal and to engage the citizenry.

As the Honourable Michael Bryant, Attorney General and minister responsible for democratic renewal, has stated, "There are a few key planks of this particular bill. Firstly, elections will be held on the first Thursday, every four years, starting Thursday, October 4, 2007."

As one of my colleagues was sharing with me this morning, this is yet another of the long and burgeoning list of promises that the government of Ontario is fulfilling today.

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One of the things that this particular bill will do is strengthen democracy and engage the people of Ontario in this, the most ambitious democratic renewal process in our history. As we said, it will ensure that government works for Ontarians, and not around them.

I'd now like to turn to the second broad area that I'd like to consider, and that is, as I mentioned earlier, new Canadians. With that, I would like to quote James Clarke, who was a former Secretary of State, again, of the United States, who said, "A politician thinks of the next election. A statesman, of the next generation."

One of the things that new Canadians who come to this country—who may have hailed from countries with less robust democratic systems, if there was democracy in anything but name at all—will often tell you is that one of the great privileges that they feel, one of the great marks of citizenship that they feel, along with the signing of the citizenship papers, the oath of that particular station, the ceremony and singing of O Canada and all the rest of it, one of the great things that they feel privileged to do, some for the very first time in their lives, is to actually participate in the democratic process.

New Canadians will tell you that when they have come from countries which often would not ask them for any kind of voting at all or, if there was at least the semblance of a mock democratic process, where they might find, for example, the president and his party as the only option on the ballot for whom to vote, or that the voting day itself in particular districts was essentially impassable because of either riots, police, protests or crowds becoming unruly—one of the great things that new Canadians will tell you is that they are honoured and privileged to actually cast a vote in the democratic process.

They will realize, as we publicize the details of this particular bill, that the government of Ontario, by fixing the date of elections, by removing the gamesmanship, is opening up the opportunity for those individuals to exercise their democratic right, their democratic privilege, by casting a vote both federally and provincially in ways that they value and that are even hard for us to express. As I said, these are individuals who have perhaps come from, say, a country like mainland China, where the only vote is taken by internal party people within the confines of that particular ruling class, that particular ruling party.

So it's a very great initiative that we are putting forth, as I mentioned, really among the very first in the Commonwealth.

The third area that I wanted to speak about is regarding schools, universities and just the broader educational communities. With that, I would like to begin with a quotation from Sir Winston Churchill, who said, "No part of the education of a politician is more indispensable than the fighting of elections." Of course, Churchill, in his infinite wisdom, was talking about re-engaging the people, being on the hustings, speaking at Hyde Park, learning directly, without any intercession, without pollsters, without the backroom boys, but actually going directly to the people.

One of the great things that schools, colleges and universities at all levels are going to sense with this

particular bill is that when they teach their kids or their graduate students or when there's an oral defence of a PhD about the democratic process in this province and in North America, when they realize that there are fixed elections, fixed campaign periods, that a lot of the gamesmanship, as I said, is removed, they will be able to plan their civics classes, civics lessons. They will be able to participate fully in the democratic process.

I can see, for example, within my own riding so many of the schools actually assigning electoral participation—getting out on to the hustings with whatever particular party of their choice—as part of school projects.

As you'll note, many times here at Queen's Park, in the Legislature, we are host to students of all ages who come to see their government in action, to hear the words being spoken here in Parliament, the exchange of debate and ideas. With this bill, the democratic renewal bill, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2004, we in the McGuinty government are moving forward in all these areas, whether it's the restoration or the improvement of democracy, not gamesmanship, well appreciated by new Canadians and by those who honour and value democracy, in particular our educational communities. It is with that that I move to support this bill.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I'm always glad to join in a debate on a hot and smoggy day here in Toronto. Hopefully the good people at home are in somewhat more comfortable conditions than all of us in the Legislature right now. But this is a very important piece of legislation.

I want to preface my remarks by saying one thing. I'm proud of the Premier. I'm proud of the Premier for doing this. And I'll tell you why. One of the moments where I was proudest of the Premier of the day, Mr McGuinty, was when he was Leader of the Opposition. When our party, as part of our overarching platform, announced this to the people of Ontario prior to the last election, the Premier had the great opportunity to be on TVO with Steve Paikin. I'm sure many of our viewers watch Steve on TVO. He was interviewing Dalton McGuinty, then Leader of the Opposition, and he said to him, "Are you crazy? One of the great tools, one of the great powers, one of the great advantages you would have if you were to be the Premier is the ability to have le droit de seigneur, the right of the king, to decide when an election is going to be. Why, man, why would you give up that right?"

Do you know what he said? I'll always remember this, because I remember this story with pride. He said, "Steve, now, can you imagine if we actually go ahead with this reform that we've promised to do and there are fixed elections in this province, and another political party comes along and says, 'You know what? We don't agree with fixed elections. What we'd like to do is to change the system back to the old way, where the Premier of the day can call an election whenever he or she thinks he or she can win it.' Would the people support that? They wouldn't. They would not support that."

That's why I know that this historic piece of legislation is the right thing to do. Because people, when they examined it, would say, "Of course it's the fair thing to do." And if we do this, I can assure you, no politician in this province will ever be able to go back to the old system where they have this personal right to decide when an election should be.

There are 1,211 days to the next election. I'm sure my friends in the opposition are probably jotting that down right now, as I speak, and putting it in their calendars—1,211 days. Everybody in this House, everybody in the province knows when the next election is going to be. Now, that's fair, because everybody knows.

My daughter, Alexandra, will be 19, it will be her birthday, on October 4, 2007.

Interjection: Really?

Mr Wilkinson: It is. And what made me think of that is, my daughter now knows, without a shadow of a doubt, that she will vote in the next election. Hopefully, she'll vote for her father. But you never know; it's a free country. But she is in grade 10. What this bill says to every high school student from grade 9 up is that they will be allowed to vote.

Now, here we are as a society, trying to change a scourge to our democracy, which is the lack of voter turnout, particularly in the younger ages. Only about 25% of young voters vote, because they don't think it's important to them. Every high school student in this province knows that they're going to have the vote in the next provincial election. Every member of this Legislature must reach out to those students. If they don't, it will be at their own peril, because we know who's going to be able to vote. I think it will be incumbent upon us to reach out to those young Ontarians to make sure they feel part of the system. Because we can go into every high school classroom, as MPPs from all parties, and say, "You have the vote. You may not be 18 yet, but we can assure you that you will have a vote on October 4, 2007." I think that's going to be revolutionary in this province. I think it will be. I think that's one of the great benefits of this very forward-thinking piece of legislation.

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I want you to know that I'm proud of our democratic reform proposals. There are really five promises that we've made. The first one was that we would introduce legislation to ban government-paid, partisan, self-promotional advertising. As I've said in this House before, my God, were people upset about that. One of the reasons I think we are here in the Liberal caucus is because so many people were so thoroughly unhappy that their taxpayer money was being spent by the previous government to promote itself shamelessly. We've introduced that legislation. So there's a promise that has been kept.

Every member in our caucus has a seat on a cabinet committee. I know I serve, at the discretion of the Premier, on the cabinet committee on economic affairs. It's a fascinating experience, even though I am the rookiest of the rump rookies in this Legislature.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): The firm.

Mr Wilkinson: The great firm of Zimmer, Wynne, Wong and Wilkinson. Always, we are here—

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): And the others.

Mr Wilkinson: And the others, of course, but I'm just the rumpiest of the rump rookies right here in the back row.

We are able to be on those cabinet committees, and that has been a great empowerment of our caucus, to be part of government and to have our say at the very birth of new legislation. The Premier has appointed the Attorney General, the Honourable Michael Bryant, to be the minister for democratic renewal, and he is ably assisted by my friend the member for Sarnia-Lambton, who is his parliamentary assistant on this file. She'll be speaking after this.

The fourth promise that we made is the promise in our platform that we would fix election dates to be every four years. It's going to be the first Thursday of October. We were elected on October 2, 2003. I'm sure the people will cut us some slack because we're actually going four years and two days. Surely within a week we could have some leeway. That's when the next election is going to be.

The fifth thing is we have agreed to explore the issue of proportional representation. But of the five election promises that we've made, we've already kept or are keeping four of them. By getting this off the deck, it will allow us to look at other issues.

This proposal, on the face of it and beyond the face of it—but actually, on examination—is fair. I am 45 years old and I can recall five governments of three different political stripes that went to the end of their mandates. I remember the Liberal government under the great Pierre Trudeau and his successor, Mr Turner; I remember the Mulroney government, which at the end was taken over by Ms Campbell; and I remember the Bob Rae government. Three parties, all at the end of five years. I believe the Bob Rae government actually went beyond five years. There was a bit of a loophole there and they extended it just as far as possible before they met with the people so people could render whether or not they deserved another mandate. We all know what happened in all three of those elections. People were frustrated by that. They felt used by it.

On the other hand, at the other extreme, we have Prime Ministers—some who have been very successful, I might add; the former Prime Minister of Canada—who were able to cannily drop an election. It's good for the press. It allows them to write endlessly and speculate about whether or not there's going to be an election, but I don't think it serves the interest of the people.

Finally, it's efficient. It's efficient because, for people to vote, they have to be on the voters' list. We know when the next election is going to be, so it helps us create the voters' list that will ensure that people have their franchise.

Finally, I want to say—and it is so good to see the member for Nepean-Carleton come here, just dropping in. I was speaking to somebody last night—actually a federal member—and he said, "I don't like fixed election dates." I said, "Really?" He also said, "We've got to stop this cycle of governments, as they leave, trying to get re-elected, painting this rosy economic picture of the state of the land economically, and then new parties finding out that perhaps the other party was not completely forthcoming." So our promise now is that, six months before the next election, the Provincial Auditor, who is independent of this place, will write a report to tell people the state of the books so we can stop this endless cycle of rosy expectations followed by a very strong dose of reality that the next government inherits.

How can we do that? How can we say, "In six months before the next election," if we don't tell people when the next election is? That's one of the great advantages of this reform. This reform allows us to stop yet another problem we have in the system. This reform leads to the other reform, so that never again will the people of Ontario go into an election with competing promises and not be able to understand the state of the books of the province.

I support this bill and I commend the minister. There are 1,211 days left in this government; everyone knows that.

Mr Qaadri: This mandate.

Mr Wilkinson: This mandate; true, because we're always hopeful. I look forward to my daughter's 19th birthday on October 4, 2007. Thank you.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): It was interesting to hear the member for Perth-Middlesex. He certainly was eloquent about the reason, the rationale and the various dynamics. And I have to say that my father's birthday is on October 4 as well, except that he won't be 19 at that point in time; he will be 87, and I think he has never missed a vote. Actually, he told me it's good thing that I ran for the Liberals; otherwise he couldn't vote for me. That's what he said to me.

I stand to speak on this bill, and I want to say that the minister responsible for democratic renewal, the Honourable Michael Bryant, certainly has a very strong commitment to democratic renewal. Democratic renewal is about making government work better. It's about strengthening our democratic institutions, the participation of the citizens in the province, and more transparency and accountability for what government does and how it does its job during the four years. It's one thing to want, sit here during the bantering that goes on sometimes in the House, and it's another thing to take a look at the facts and the reality that we face on a daily basis.

I'm very proud to be part of a government that is set on making a difference and doing the right thing for the public interest. The fixed election dates: I'm sure we'll hear the opposition talk about this being the Americanization of our democracy, which it is not. This is about bringing some consistency, reliability and efficiency to a corporation called government so that Elections Ontario has the capacity to have some kind of assurance that there is going to be an election at a certain time so they can better prepare. We probably had an extreme situation in, I would say, the last year, from the time we had a new

Premier in this province in 2002, I guess it was. There was this on-again, off-again, on-again election because they used the election date almost as a political football. That will no longer happen in the province because a fixed election date allows Elections Ontario to better prepare, because they have a lot of work to do. And it's a better use of their dollars, rather than putting up, if you want, their offices and then having to take them down again, setting the system up and taking it down again. It's a tremendous waste of money, energy and just people's time in doing this.

As well, it's a way of better preparing the electoral lists that have to be done. It is no small feat to put on an election. I am proud that this is another example of trying to make government work better. And an election date that is set means that young people, our citizens in the province, will know that every four years, on the first Thursday in October, there will be an election, and no one can play silly games.

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It has been a tradition that the Premiers of this province have had the discretion to set the length of the campaign period and to find out—how do I say it?—the way the wind was blowing so they could call an election. This is about changing that, and now we're going to ensure that there are 28 full days, that all parties know that's the campaign period and when it's going to begin.

We have made other changes that I believe are of benefit and in the public interest, things like ensuring that before the next election as well the Provincial Auditor will look at the books and be able to qualify that either yes or no, the financial affairs of the province are what the government tells the people of Ontario they are. We did a great disservice to the people of Ontario before the last election, and I say this Parliament has. Why? Because the government of the day provided financial reports that did not indicate the true picture of the financial situation of this province. That did a great disservice to the people of Ontario.

I have had constituents say to me, "Is there no recourse when a government does not state the true finances?" When people have to pay their taxes, they certainly have to provide accurate information to their accountants, and it's done on an honour system. But nonetheless there is a moral obligation on the part of the person providing the information that that information is correct. That did not happen in this province, and it put all of us in a situation that no one expected. Now that aspect of accounting, if you want, will not happen any more because we will have oversight in this province—more transparency, more accountability on the financial situation of the province.

Another aspect is that we are going to apply standards to advertisement that the government, on behalf of the people of Ontario, puts out in the public interest. That advertisement is not about what I call self-promotional advertising, telling the public how good a job you're doing; it's about providing people with needed information such as how to prevent people from getting West Nile virus. I think that is the role of government: to always protect the public interest. It's not about self-promotion.

We've brought in legislation to stop that, to put standards there that have to be reviewed by the Provincial Auditor, now the Auditor General, that will ensure those standards are met. We also have brought forward a change to the Audit Act, an ability for this Provincial Auditor to oversee transfer agencies and value-for-money audits done on them, which has not happened in the past.

It's about good government. It's not about just holding on to power, which we saw for the last eight years. What we are doing today really does take away some of the power that the Premier had in establishing and setting the date. That power was used and abused by all parties in the past to meet the political interests, not the public interest sometimes, of all parties. This happened again, and you see it happening in various jurisdictions as well. So all parties are guilty of this.

It's not easy. It takes a great deal of courage to take away some of the power that's inherent in the position of a Premier. There is an intent on the part of this government to do the right thing, to ensure that we bring in legislation and a modus operandi that truly transforms the way we are going to govern.

We are engaged in what we call results-based planning. It is an incredibly exciting aspect of better management of government. This was not in place. Transfer partners did not have to justify results based on the investment that was made into their agencies. Now that is where we are going. It's a tremendous paradigm shift to go to results-based planning, and it's an onerous process.

We went through the budget not long ago, and that budget was one of the most courageous stands a Premier and a finance minister have taken. It's courageous because the easy thing to do would have been to just sit and say, "You know what? We have a choice and we are going to cut our services, continue to erode our services, or we're going to pay down the deficit, a deficit we weren't supposed to have." Instead, we decided that we're going to have to do both. We have to rebuild our services and at the same time we have to also pay down the deficit.

One of the myths around this place is that the previous administration were good fiscal managers. When you look at the evidence, they were not good fiscal managers in any respect, because their finances were way out of control. They were giving out tax cuts before they were paying down their deficits, and therefore put this province in an incredibly precarious position. I would suggest that this notion of balancing a budget at all costs, without any consideration to the consequences it had on people's lives—

Mr Levac: And added $15 billion more on the debt.

Ms Di Cocco: They would also raise the debt by $21 billion. I have a question: Where did all the money go? That's the question I have for the members from the previous administration.

Nonetheless, I would say that this bill is a very significant step to better democracy in the province. It is a

significant step to stabilizing and not allowing for games to be played when we near an election.

I spoke to former parliamentarians, and you see the commitment and dedication people have when they come to this place. Sometimes it saddens me when I see ideological blinkers on that prevent people from thinking critically and, I would suggest, being frank about some of the issues that have to be dealt with in the province. On this bill, by the way, I have had many responses across the province from people who are very supportive about having fixed election dates, because it provides stability, consistency and an efficient way to do the business of this corporation called government.

I am thrilled that I am part of a team that has a very strong commitment to making this government, to making this place, work better, and am part of a team that does what is sometimes a lot harder to do, because it's about what is best in the public interest, not in our own self-interest. We will continue to strengthen our democratic institutions in this province, unlike what we saw when the budget was taken out of this place and put into Magna. I did not see one member from the previous administration stand up and say, "This is not right and we should not be taking the budget out of this Legislature, because this is the people's House and the people's representatives have a role that they must play in scrutinizing the budget."

I am proud that the Premier, the minister responsible for democratic renewal and this government have had the courage to bring forward this bill, because it is better for the people of Ontario.

1650

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Marchese: I want to say that I don't see this as much of an ideological issue between parties, so you'll have a variety of opinions, I suspect, from all sorts of members on this side of House. I think this is good for debate; it really is. I don't see this necessarily, like the Liberals who have spoken, as a serious part of democratic renewal. When people argue that this might engage voters to vote, might motivate them to vote, I really don't think this will do it. If some of you think that, I believe you are mistaken, because that's not what will get people to vote.

I appreciate the argument that the electorate will have certainty. That's an obvious one. They won't have to be guessing about when a government is likely to call an election and using that for their electoral purposes. In that regard, it's positive to take away the power of a party to determine when it wants the advantage of calling an election so it can get itself elected. I understand that. The positive is that people will now have a date that will be fixed, more or less, in that October period, given a variety of circumstances.

A lot of people will say, "It's a good thing," but in terms of speaking about democratic renewal, I would be more excited to speak about proportional representation as an issue that would be here in front of us to debate than this one. I know we're going to be discussing it. I don't know how committed you are to the whole issue of whether we're going to have proportional representation for the next election, but I look forward to that debate as soon as possible. That will get me going.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I am very pleased to see this piece of legislation come forward. I want to congratulate my colleague from St Paul, the minister introducing the bill, and the members from Scarborough Southwest, Etobicoke North, Perth-Middlesex and Sarnia-Lambton. I thought they all added something different in terms of the value of this historic first step, and I underline that this is only the first in a series of initiatives that will help this place and governments be more democratic.

I look forward to the debate that the member from Trinity-Spadina, who just spoke, issued. He talks about proportional representation, and we have a commitment to introduce an element to address that as well.

One thing I would say in terms of an election date is that it should help turnout. Add that to a few other things, like my private member's bill, which was there in terms of party affiliation so people know who is affiliated with which group, which party etc, helping Elections Ontario and Elections Canada to be organized. They know when it is and when they can get their people in.

We make a big assumption about the level of votership. I will tell you, and I've said this to the Chief Election Officer, Mr Kingsley, that in my opinion, in my riding, the list was 15% to 20% incorrect. Do an analysis of 80%, not of 100%, and then we're talking about 60%-plus participation in that. So I don't buy the argument that we have such a poor record. I think our administration is not as good as it should be, and I'd be happy to talk about this further at another time.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I'm going to be making a few comments in a while, but I just want to address the argument that somehow by fixing the date you are taking away from the governing party the opportunity to call the election when it is to its political advantage.

We only have to look back in recent history. In 1985, we had 42 years of Progressive Conservative government. The next government lasted two years. They won a non-confidence vote, which presumably they didn't call. In the next election, in 1990, Premier Peterson had the advantage of calling it when he wanted to. What did he do? He called it before three years were up, it became a major part of the election and he lost. So the guy who had the advantage lost. Premier Rae decided to wait until the very last moment to drop the writ. Everybody knew it was coming. He lost. Premier Eves, when he decided to call it eight years later, lost.

To me, what this points to is the fact that with today's sophisticated campaigns, everybody knows when the train is coming down the track. They may be out by a week or two, but it doesn't really matter, in the bottom analysis. So that whole argument, in my view, is blown up.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): This is a little bit like baptism. Baptism isn't

the end of a journey; it's the start of a journey, the start of a sojourn. I agree with the member opposite: If this were taken in isolation from all the other proposed reforms, it would be a tepid and ineffectual response to any argument that you're trying to promote greater participation in true democratic processes.

But that's not what the minister and the honourable member are talking about. They're talking about this as one of several key components. Let's face it: Our democratic institutions—the level of confidence in governments generally; the level of disengagement of citizens, particularly young citizens; and the lack of any kind of meaningful embrace of teledemocracy, citizen juries, deliberative democracy and so many other components is so profound that we have to start somewhere. I think the minister and the member have weighed out very much the springboard for the kinds of changes we want to see.

Our goal as a government—one of those measurements we talk about—is to ensure that participation down the road is going to be enhanced by at least 10%, and I look forward to that.

I look forward to the opportunity to speak more about some of the other things that need to be done, including the concept of proportional representation, which I support and will speak on when I get the chance next week, and also the issue of how we can build some enhanced integrity into the first-past-the-post system, which I think is going to require us to move to preferential ballots. I think there are some really good things we can do, and I look forward to further debate of these issues.

The Deputy Speaker: Reply?

Ms Di Cocco: I thank the members from Trinity-Spadina, Ottawa Centre, Lanark-Carleton and Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

This is absolutely not the only item. This is one aspect of a bigger attempt, if you want, at different components of democratic renewal. This is one aspect to it.

Having a fixed election date is not about giving an advantage or a disadvantage. It's about that certainty, as the member from Trinity-Spadina said. It's about the ability to organize so we aren't in disarray and so the people at Elections Ontario—I call them the protectors of democracy, the keepers of democracy—have the ability to do their work up until the election, to make sure their ducks are in a row so they can better prepare. This is one component.

As you know, the House leaders will be looking at, and were looking at, changes in the standing orders—how do we make this place work better—enhancing the role of the private member; looking at our committee systems and enhancing them; looking at different recommendations so that this Parliament, this Legislature, will work better, that there's more respect and better rapport here; and that we can actually do the job that the people of Ontario sent us here to do.

1700

It's also about restoring credibility to the institution. This is one step of many more. It is about electoral reform and looking at first-past-the-post versus proportional representation.

Interjection.

Ms Di Cocco: No. Or looking at both; looking at all. Absolutely not "versus." So this is one part of a big picture.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Sterling: It is interesting that I speak today. As was noted by the government House leader, this happens to be my 27th anniversary. That long experience over that period of time will perhaps allow me to look at some of these things in a holistic and big-picture view, as opposed to looking at one thing, as this happens to be.

Before I begin, Mr Speaker, I hope you'll forgive me for wishing my mother a happy birthday on her 95th birthday yesterday.

The Deputy Speaker: I join you.

Mr Sterling: We had a party for her on Sunday. Unfortunately, I should have told Mr Watson about it—it was in his constituency—but she only wanted one politician there and I was the choice. At any rate, I've got to tell you that my mom raised a family of four kids on her own. My dad died when she was 36, and I was only two years of age at that time. She was a very strong woman, still is a strong woman and continues to give me good political advice. She's very, very sharp.

Mr Levac: I bet you don't mess with it.

Mr Sterling: I "don't mess with it," is right.

I'm going to be sharing my time with Toby Barrett, another member of our caucus.

We've talked a little bit about what democratic renewal and those kind of things are about. One of the greatest things that happened in terms of reforming this House happened under the Mike Harris government, when we went from 130 seats to 103 seats and had coincident boundaries with our federal riding. It was an issue and an item which I pushed very strongly on with Premier Harris before he was the Premier. I know many members felt the pain of that happening to them because their ridings changed and there were, of course, fewer politicians as a result of it.

However, I do believe that having coincident boundaries with our federal colleagues creates less confusion in the minds of the public. The public know they have one MP and one MPP. There's one Lanark-Carleton provincially and there's one Lanark-Carleton federally. So I think that is perhaps the greatest democratic reform I've seen that has occurred in this place.

We have heard, and the government has put forward, a number of initiatives with regard to changing the system here. One was done without legislation, and that was putting backbench MPPs from the governing party on cabinet committees. In fact, every one of them is on a cabinet committee.

On the one hand, that can be seen as a very positive move in engaging private members to a greater degree, but on the other hand it can be seen as a loss of independence on the part of MPPs as well. If the Premier and the Premier's office owns your appointment to a particular cabinet committee, and you become part of the cabinet by the very fact that you're sitting on the cabinet

committee, when a member comes in from the backbench of the governing party and sits in this place and says, "Can I vote against a government initiative, can I vote against a piece of legislation that the government brings forward?" he or she must feel that there is a degree of betrayal because they have sat in the room where the decision was made.

I believe that our parliamentary system was based upon the fact that certain individuals are cabinet ministers and other individuals are not. Those other members of caucus who are not cabinet ministers of the governing party, in my view, should feel free to exercise discretion from time to time to vote against their government. That is, in fact, healthy for democracy, it's healthy for our province and it's healthy for our country.

It is further complicated by the fact that the Premier and the Premier's office have the right to enrich each backbencher in the governing party. I don't believe there is any member of the governing party who does not hold another job and receive an additional stipend, somewhere around $10,000 or $12,000 more, for doing that particular job. I'm not against MPPs getting paid more for what they're doing because I believe MPPs are underpaid at the present time, but I do object to the fact that the Premier and Premier's office have such control over the financial well-being of the backbenchers. I don't think it is done intentionally, but I think, if it is done intentionally, it can be used to twist the arm of the particular backbencher to come to the game and fall in line and vote with the team, notwithstanding that the member might feel very different in terms of his moral convictions, or he believes that his constituents don't feel that they support a particular government initiative.

That one has been there a long time, too. It's not just this government that has had the ability to appoint all of their backbenchers to an additional job; we had that when we were in government. The government before that had that. It goes back maybe 30 years, but that doesn't say it's right, either. What I am trying to get at is the power of the leader to control what goes on in here and not have healthy debate, either in the government caucus, which, of course, is secret, or in this Legislature or in the constituencies of the members.

We've had that one particular initiative of the government.

We had another initiative with regard to the executive council having to be here or be docked $500 and somebody keeps a checklist or whatever it is with regard to the Premier. I guess he keeps a checklist and he is going to fine somebody $500 if he is not here and he doesn't have an excuse. I find that a little childish. I think it's almost going back to the day when they took attendance when you went to school. I predict, by the way, that nobody will be fined this $500 in the next four years. There will be miraculously good excuses for every absence that takes place here with regard to every cabinet minister here. So that one is a bit phony in a way. I would not say "kind of phony"; I think it's real phony.

The other part of this debate is, can you discuss these things in isolation? Can you discuss true democratic reform by piecing off little things like having a fixed date for an election? I don't think it's a big deal, frankly, whether you have a fixed date for an election or not. As I said before, I don't think it gives governments any kind of advantage any more. Probably, setting a fixed date gives the governing party even more advantage than having a variable date because all the bureaucracy knows when the next election is going to be. You can be sure that that bureaucracy is going to build, in terms of announcements etc, as they go toward the date; as indicated, October 4, 2007.

1710

So I'm not certain it offers the opposition any equal opportunity in the election. As I demonstrated before, we have over the past number of years seen governments fall on a regular basis. Probably the average length of a government has been six years, something like that, over the last 20 years. I predict it may come down even lower than that after October 4, 2007.

I want to read a column from the Ottawa Citizen by Randall Denley in reaction to this announcement with regard to the fixed date. I think this column really does sound in another point I'd like to make.

"It's great to see Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty championing democracy, but it's a bit like closing the barn door after you've set the barn on fire.

"McGuinty said Tuesday that some Ontarians are 'cynical' or 'disillusioned' about politics. No doubt. Do you think it could have something to do with politicians who"—I don't know whether I can say the word, even though it's here—break promises "to get elected."

"McGuinty seems to think the problem is lack of fixed election dates. He's solved that by telling us that the next provincial election will be October 4, 2007."

But as you will note from the legislation, and nobody has talked about the legislation, if October 4 falls on a religious holiday, then the Chief Election Officer must pick another day within the seven following days. We find out that in fact October 4, 2007, is a religious holiday. It's a Jewish religious holiday, as confirmed by a rabbi in Ottawa. We know that notwithstanding that we're talking about October 4, 2007, it's unlikely that the next election will be October 4, 2007. So we have a bill that says October 4, 2007, but it will probably occur a week later.

Interestingly enough, as well, the bill doesn't deny the election returning officer from holding the election on Saturday or Sunday, so we could have an election on Sunday, October 7, according to this legislation, whereas it was always the Thursday of a week in which we had an election before. Perhaps the government would like to amend their bill to allow more latitude in that regard. I think it would be wise to keep the election on a Thursday. I don't care which day of the week it is, but I think it would better if it were constant in terms of whether every election be on a Monday or a Thursday or whatever.

Anyway, Mr Denley goes along and he talks about:

"Rather more important than the date of the election is a respect for the actual principles of democracy. In a

democracy, we transfer our power to the government with the understanding that it will seek our approval for its major policies."

"The relationship is built on trust. By breaking solid commitments not to raise taxes or run a deficit, McGuinty has broken that trust.

"The only really good news in knowing that the next election is somewhere around October 4, 2007, is that now we know how much longer we have to put up with him. Any prisoner can tell you that knowing your release date helps you endure the sentence.

"There's likely to be a run on the new four-year Dalton McGuinty calendar, the one that counts down the days until we can vote him out.

"If McGuinty really believes in democracy, there are two things he can do to prove it.

"Rather than neutering the Taxpayer Protection Act, he could choose to live by it, as he promised, and put his tax-and-spend plan to the voters in a referendum.

"Getting rid of the Taxpayer Protection Act will actually reduce democracy in Ontario. The act has been mocked as some kind of right-wing bridle on government, but its basic premise is sound. It doesn't prevent politicians from raising taxes, but it does prevent them from doing it by stealth.

"A tax increase that was approved in an election is perfectly acceptable under the act. The alternative is a referendum.

"If politicians want to increase taxes, they should seek our approval. The act, in providing those provisions, places actual power in the hands of the people, where it belongs. It's our money, after all....

"If McGuinty wants to restore democracy to Ontario, a referendum would be a good step in that direction. If his plan is such a good one, he ought to be able to persuade us. Setting an election date for 2007 leaves the people in the same position they are now—powerless until election day. And powerless after, too, if we can't find politicians with more integrity.

"If he hasn't got the courage to face the people with his spending plans, perhaps McGuinty could at least have a free vote on the budget. Free votes are most appropriate for moral issues. Perhaps there are actually some backbench Liberal MPPs who think deceiving the people who voted for them is a moral issue."

That was sort of what I was talking about before. The problem with our present structure is that the leader and the leader's office, the Premier and the Premier's office, have such close ties and such a grip on not only the financial wherewithal of their backbenchers but also their position in government.

"As it is now, the Premier is acting like he's not really even aware of the astounding anger his budget has created. Instead of fixing the real democratic deficit, which he created, he wants to give us smug little civics lectures and pat himself on the back for fixing election dates.

"This guy has got a lot bigger things to fix than election dates, and he'd better get started."

What Mr Denley has recognized, and what I have perhaps recognized to some degree over the long period of time that I have been here, is that the rules around what happens in here and how we are elected are not nearly as important as the integrity with which we conduct ourselves on a day-to-day basis. The rules on how we decide whether there are 103 of us or 106 of us or 200 of us are not as important as the fact that when we present ourselves to the public, we are forthright, we tell them what they can expect and we live up to those promises. The cynicism that has been created by the breaking of the promises by this government will not heal the democratic deficit which they have created. So all the good work that we might do here—we might debate, we might create new legislation, we might create new standing orders—will not meet the demands of the public for democratic renewal.

I want to then go specifically to this bill. You may know that I introduced two other bills in this Legislature, Bills 51 and 54, prior to the government bringing forward Bill 86. Both of those bills pegged an election day four years out, on October 4, coincident with Bill 86. As well, I picked a date of June 7, 2007. The real reason behind my introducing those bills was there was a rumour that the government was going to, in the first term, extend their term to four and a half years. So I brought in those two pieces of legislation to pre-empt any attempt by the government to try to extend the first term to four and a half years and say, "In October, it's not good because we're running the municipal elections. So we should have it in June. But let's not have it in June 2007. Let's get at least four and a half years and go to June 2008." So that's why I brought these bills in.

But there are a couple of differences with regard to my two bills and Bill 86. I just want to highlight those.

1720

If you read through Bill 86—and I had the opportunity to be briefed by the Attorney General's staff at the Democratic Renewal Secretariat yesterday to confirm what I thought the bill said or didn't say or didn't do—there are two significant differences with regard to my bill and Bill 86. One relates to the fact that in order for a confidence vote to succeed in the Legislature to call an election, what I have in my bill is a double majority. I say that not only must there be a majority of the Legislature, but there must be a majority of the those parties which are not governing, which are not part of the cabinet. I did this because of what happened in 1977. It wasn't exactly the same, but one of the problems when you are dealing with democratic renewal and the rules that we have in this Legislature is that you've got to be concerned not only with majority governments but with what minority governments are doing as well.

What happened in 1977: Bill Davis wanted to have an election. You may remember that he was elected in 1971, when he won the leadership of the party. He won a comfortable majority in 1971 but lost favour with the electorate, and in 1975 had a minority government. I think he had 52 seats out of 120 seats at that time, but he

still formed the government in 1975. By 1977 he was gaining popularity; he was becoming stronger and wanted an election. He wanted to trigger an election by having a non-confidence vote and having the opposition precipitate the election. So he brought forward a bill which limited rental increases in rent control. Rent control was brought in in 1975 or 1976. He put the maximum rent increase to be 8%, and instead of 8%, the opposition wanted the maximum rent increase at 6%.

Tom Wells, who was then the House leader—who has now passed away—wrote to the opposition, "We consider this a matter of confidence." So they had the vote in the Legislature and the Tories lost that it was considered a matter of confidence. Premier Davis walked down the hall and saw the Lieutenant Governor. He dissolved Parliament, a writ was issued and an election was on. The Tories came back with 58 seats. That's when both Jim Bradley and I were first elected. So the Tories went from 52 to 58. So it's not exactly the same as this particular scenario, but I can see the instances where it might favour the Premier to precipitate a confidence vote which he or she might lose in this place. So there are some exceptions to October 4 or around that date, as I discussed before, as being the actual election date.

I think it's important for members and the public to understand exactly how this place closes down before an election. What happens is this: There's only one person—now, and after Bill 86 passes, if it passes, there's only one way that this place closes down. The Premier of the day goes to the Lieutenant Governor and says, "I want you to dissolve Parliament," and the Lieutenant Governor basically has only one other choice. If he thinks another party can govern, can muster enough people in the place to actually govern, that would be the case. So in spite of the fact that we say it's going to be October 4, if Premier McGuinty wanted to disregard Bill 86, he could walk down to the Lieutenant Governor the day after this bill is passed and say, "I want an election." Let's all be clear that there's no sanction in Bill 86 against Mr McGuinty's doing that; in other words, no penalty. In fact—

Interjection.

Mr Sterling: What I'm saying is, he has that option after Bill 86 is passed. We could almost describe October 4 as a wish date for the next election to take place.

Now the reason he might not walk down to the Lieutenant Governor is that it might be politically very unpalatable for him to do so. But if there was some manner of crisis: another SARS strike, some other event debilitating to the Ontario economy or another leader was elected—Mr McGuinty is not very popular these days, and there's speculation he may not be leader of party in the next election. The next leader might walk down the hall and say, "Look, I need a mandate for my leadership, notwithstanding Bill 86."

I cleared those particular perceptions with the Attorney General's staff. I had them in my office yesterday and asked them, what really constrains the Premier from walking down the hall and dissolving Parliament? Nothing, other than the political downside of doing so. So October 4 is not really a legal date as such; it's sort of a commitment, I guess, that the election is going to be on that date.

I asked the staff as well what would happen if he didn't walk down the hall to the Lieutenant Governor 28, 29 or whatever number of days before October 4? I said, "Would there be an election on October 4? Could it happen after that?" The Attorney General's staff couldn't confirm to me that the Lieutenant Governor would act unilaterally without the Premier coming and asking for the dissolution of Parliament.

Let's say Dalton McGuinty decided on September 4 or 5 or whatever—it doesn't matter what the date is, but 28 days before October 4 or whatever date the election is going to be on—that it would be very disadvantageous to him to walk down the hall and go to the Lieutenant Governor. Let's say he was at the same level that he is in the polls now, and he said, "You know, I may take the wrath of the people because I don't have the election on October 4, but I'm going to lose anyway. So I'm not going to walk down the hall." I don't think the Lieutenant Governor has the right to call the election.

I want to point out that I put a section in my bills, Bills 51 and 54, because I read the objections to British Columbia, the only province that has tried to fix a date. There is a conundrum here. It's not easy to fix a date in the British parliamentary system because of the precedents we have, the traditions we have and those kinds of things. But I did put in my bill subsection 9.1(2): "It is the responsibility of the Premier of Ontario to advise the Lieutenant Governor to dissolve the Legislature in sufficient time to permit the taking of the poll as provided in subsection (1)." There is no obligation on the Premier to do that in Bill 86. I think that's the very least that should be in the bill.

There's no sanction if the Premier didn't go down and do it; in other words, there's no fine. There is, of course, no jail term or anything like that. But at least in this bill there is an obligation upon him, put there in writing, that he go down the hall and consult the Lieutenant Governor 28 or 29 days prior to October 4 or whatever date on which we're going to have this next election.

1730

We have a piece of legislation which doesn't really alter the power of the Premier. As I said before, I don't think you can construct a piece of legislation to actually deal with that particular problem because of the constitutional set-up that we have with the Parliament of Ontario and the role of the Lieutenant Governor here. But the very first part of the act, Bill 86, the one we're debating here, says this: "Nothing in this section affects the powers of the Lieutenant Governor, including the power to dissolve the Legislature, by proclamation in Her Majesty's name, when the Lieutenant Governor sees fit." OK? Now, he or she does that, the Lieutenant Governor does that, when the Premier asks him or her to do that. So Premier McGuinty, if he's still the Premier at that point in time or whenever it would happen, still has that right

to walk down there and dissolve this Parliament at any time. His only downside is that he has promised in this piece of legislation to have that election on or around October 4, 2007.

We have a piece of legislation that doesn't really mean that much. It's a promise. He could do the same by just standing up in this House and saying, "I promise the people of Ontario that I will have an election on October 4, 2007," sit down, it would be over, and that would be the end of it. Put it in a piece of legislation—there's no sanction if he doesn't follow it. There's no penalty to the governing party if he doesn't follow it. So there you have it. The legislation doesn't do much in that regard.

There is one good part of this legislation which I support very much, and that is that, because of our hookup with the federal boundaries and our alignment with the federal boundaries, when we passed a piece of legislation before—I believe it's in the Representation Act—our riding or constituency associations that we have would automatically dissolve on about August 20 or August 24 of this year, this summer. They would automatically dissolve, by law. That would be the end of them. This act extends their life to December 31, 2006, unless the constituency association wants to dissolve before that, and to create new constituency associations, presumably along different geographical boundaries. There is provision in here in terms of how the assets would be divided if there's a dispute, and the constituency association doesn't deal with them, and, I guess more importantly, if there is a liability, as to how the political party becomes responsible for that as well. I support those particular provisions.

As some of the members have indicated before, this act is not a big deal. There are some good arguments for having fixed terms, having a four-year term. I believe the federal Conservative leader, Stephen Harper, supports fixed terms in terms of going forward. But I guess my concern about dealing with these things one-off is that we're not looking at the whole picture. We're not looking at the pushes and pulls of it. We haven't had a healthy debate about the fact that maybe it's healthier to have some flexibility in the hands of the Premier. I just haven't seen this particular part abused by a Premier.

I haven't seen, as either a government member or an opposition member, as I sat in opposition before and sit in opposition now—I think every one of us can see an election coming down the track. They have changed so dramatically over the last 35, 45 years that no leader can hide the fact that he or she is heading for an election. The machinery's just too big now. They know when you rent the bus. They know when you buy the ads. They know when you're printing the literature. They know when you're doing all these kinds of things. So the whole notion that that's a big problem, isn't that much.

I don't think, in terms of the electoral office—although I can see some credibility in the argument that it would be better that those who are running the election know the exact date or the approximate date. I can understand that to some degree. But I'm not so certain that we should sacrifice the other part of our British parliamentary system, where we have flexibility, to do that.

You see, if we have a situation where there truly would be a significant crisis in the province, I'm not so certain that the Premier of the day should be forced to a confidence motion to call an election. I can't picture what the disaster might be or what the matter might be, but there might be a situation where there are such differing views in our province that it would be right to have an election two and a half years in, three years in or whatever it is. That's the way the British parliamentary system that we have been operating under for over 140 years, I guess—well, almost 140 years—has worked in this province, and it's worked very well.

I'd like to see a debate, quite frankly, about the real issue of democratic reform, as people see it when they talk to me; that is, how do you transfer responsibility from the leader's office out further to the cabinet? Well, the cabinet has some responsibility, no question. But how do you transfer it out further to the backbench and the alternate side of the opposition members?

Right now, quite frankly, in our system, and with what has transpired over the last three or four years, is a cynicism which has grown up in our public that the opposition doesn't have any real responsibility, which is, in effect, somewhat true. I remember that when the Liberals were in opposition, they would debate bills for three or four days that they supported and had very little to say about, but they just wanted to force the government into a time allocation position. So we time-allocated. Nobody really cared whether we time-allocated or not, because it's all inside baseball. But, to me, that was a total lack of responsibility in terms of what a parliamentarian should be doing.

We should be supporting legislation which we think is reasonable, that we don't really care about. We shouldn't debate or over-debate things. We shouldn't drag things on that are less important than other ones. But that's not the way it's been played here.

So I think what we really need is an overall look at where the responsibilities for budget lie. Where do the responsibilities for the Ontario budget lie? If there's some way that they can be shared amongst the members of the Legislative Assembly as well as the cabinet and the Premier, then, in fact, I think you would be addressing some of the things that the public is concerned about.

In summary, therefore, I expect some of my members to vote for this bill. I expect some of them to vote against it. I don't feel strongly one way or the other with regard to it, because I think that the bill is somewhat meaningless, in the fact that it doesn't have any kind of sanction against the Premier. The Premier still has all of the options he had before. He can do what he did before. The election could be on October 4 or it could be after October 4, according to the Attorney General's staff who advised me about the responsibilities that the Premier undertook in this bill.

Lastly, I just want to say that I found it strange yesterday, when I was briefed by the Attorney General's

staff, that I had a political staff member come—I didn't find that strange; he was welcome to be there when I was there—and I was asked if they could record our briefing on tape. I've asked for a copy of that tape. I find that strange because here we are talking about democratic renewal, about a non-partisan piece of legislation, where I'm trying to be as forthright as I possibly can, and we have the office for democratic renewal coming in with their staff when the briefing was taking place and asking me to tape that particular meeting. I found it strange.

1740

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I wish to thank my fellow member from Lanark-Carleton for sharing his time with me and sharing his experience in this Legislature; as we heard today, 27 years as of today in the Ontario Legislature.

A very interesting history has just been presented and I've learned some new things about Bill 86. Sometimes things are different than they appear to be when you read legislation. Even though some of us are supporting this legislation, and I am, you wonder why you would debate something you basically feel is a good idea—to have set election dates—but as we soldier on, you learn an awful lot of new things. At face value, I look at this and I see that elections will be held the first Thursday of October, every four years, but now I realize maybe that won't be the case. Maybe they will be held before that Thursday, maybe they will be held after that Thursday, or maybe they will be held on that Thursday.

With respect to Bill 86, regarding election dates, from my look at the legislation, it tells us when the elections are going to be; it doesn't tell us where. Clearly it tells us that on the first Thursday in October, every four years, an election will be held, but we realize now it's with some possible deviations, more than one deviation perhaps, as we just heard from the member for Lanark-Carleton.

This Bill 86 does not clarify where we, as MPPs or future candidates, would do battle. It doesn't tell us where the boundaries are, or will be, whether they're existing boundaries or new boundaries or a mix of both. We've had some hints about perhaps some changes being considered in northern Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr Barrett: The member opposite from Brant and I share a boundary, a border. We share a county. On occasion we probably look at the polls and decide how many are with us and how many are against us. I oftentimes don't venture into the city and sometimes you may not want to venture into the country.

Of course this is of particular interest to sitting MPPs: Do we want to change boundaries? Are we content with where we are now? Most importantly, and the member for Brant would agree with this, when all is said and done, what is the best arrangement for the people in Ontario and, in this case, the people in Brant county, Haldimand county and Norfolk county?

Bill 86, in my view, neglects to clarify where people decide. That's a debate for another day or perhaps another amendment to another bill. As the member speaking previously indicated, the Representation Act of 1996 would have to be looked at if, for example, the existing boundaries were to remain, rather than going with the new federal boundaries. I'm in no position to know. Who knows what this government will come up with?

Just to refresh everyone's memory, I'd like to read the first part of the title of this legislation we're debating this afternoon, An Act to amend the Election Act, the Election Finances Act, the Legislative Assembly Act and the Representation Act, 1996. This bill amends these four statutes, with its primary purpose to establish fixed election dates. We now know that the next Ontario election—we are assuming—should be held on Thursday, October 4, 2007. After that, if it is held on October 4, 2007, elections will be held every four years, on the first Thursday in October.

Before I get into some of the thoughts I have in supporting fixed election dates, I would point out that this act does not remove the power of the Lieutenant Governor to declare an election. In fact, the amendment pertaining to section 9 of the Election Act states very clearly, "Nothing in this section affects the powers of the Lieutenant Governor, including the power to dissolve the Legislature." That sounds like a pretty big door has been left open in a very large way. There's a large space there.

I feel this is an important issue that is actually at present being debated right across the Dominion of Canada during the federal election. Many will know that earlier this year Conservative leader Stephen Harper called on the federal government to initiate significant democratic reform in Canada by establishing consistent four-year terms between federal elections. In calling for that change, Harper stated, "We shouldn't forget that Jean Chrétien fuelled a lot of cynicism about the electoral process in this country during his 10 years in office by calling elections whenever it suited his personal agenda."

Earlier this year, this initiative was voted down by the federal Liberals. They voted in a bloc and defeated this opposition motion. Mr Harper has since made fixed election dates a main plank in the Conservative election platform. Considering the damage done to the federal Liberals and the cynicism created through the broken-promise Ontario budget, it may not be that long before we see fixed election dates coming out of Ottawa. We'll know better by the end of this month.

With this particular legislation, Bill 86, Ontario in general is following the lead of British Columbia and the American-style system of set election dates. As we know, in the United States voters go to the polls to choose their President, for example, every four years, on the first Tuesday in November. Gordon Campbell, the Premier of British Columbia, a Liberal—or titled a Liberal—has just passed a law to fix provincial election dates in that province.

We would probably all admit or agree that there's not a party in this country that has not been tempted to manipulate the election date in order to suit their own political interests. It's become almost a natural thing, in

my observation. The Prime Minister and the various Premiers can call elections when they see fit, with the exception of BC at present. I feel it's time for this process to be taken out of political hands. To what extent Bill 86 will take it out of politics, we'll see in the coming years.

Premier McGuinty has told the Legislature that fixed election dates will reduce voter cynicism. However, we in the opposition tend to put the blame for that cynicism squarely on the Liberals opposite, since they failed to keep so many promises. This is an obvious analysis. Promises made during the election and a number of promises made since the election appear to be being broken: the promise of not raising personal income taxes, and now raising personal income taxes, whether you call it a health tax, a health premium or a health levy; failing to hold a referendum on tax increases—this was certainly discussed both verbally and visually on signs out in front of Queen's Park this afternoon; the delisting of services from health professionals—to what extent that was or was not promised in the election has now been rolled in, in the general conventional wisdom that somehow people have been betrayed on that one as well.

Voters, the people of Ontario, have good reason to be disillusioned over some of what I consider to be the bogus, or phony, promises the Liberals made in the last—

1750

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): They have lots of promises; they just can't keep them.

Mr Barrett: I agree with what you're saying over there.

Promises were made right up—

Mr Bisson: They're not bogus promises; they're broken promises.

Mr Barrett: Right. And again, sometimes I have difficulty making—

Interjection.

Mr Barrett: What is the distinction between—

Mr Bisson: There are all these commitments.

Interjection: Excuses are legitimate.

Mr Barrett: OK. This is interesting, because I get confused sometimes with the difference between a bogus promise and a phony promise. It's hard to draw the line.

Interjection: They make both of them.

Mr Barrett: There is cynicism. I hear cynicism up and down the row in the Legislature this afternoon.

Fixed election dates: Granted, that's one direction that can be taken to ameliorate some of the cynicism permeating our province. It is a step to still take us down the road of democratic reform. We do know from polling, and I will refer to a poll, that Canadians agree this is an idea whose time has come. There's a fairly recent Environics poll that found that an overwhelming majority of Canadians would like to see fixed election dates rather than leaving it exclusively up to the party in power. The figure here: 81% of Canadians would like to see a fixed date.

I would also mention that this legislation does allow for some changes in election dates. If the government loses a non-confidence vote, the Lieutenant Governor could call an election immediately. The member from Lanark-Carleton gave us an example of that occurring in the past. From what we can see, there's really no reason why that situation could not occur again in the future, in spite of the fact that Bill 86 may well be passed by this government. So there are options. The Lieutenant Governor, in the case of non-confidence, could call an election immediately. If that were to happen, the election date would then return to that regular schedule, in the future, of four years after, what is essentially an unscheduled election. As well, this bill does not prevent a government from participating in a little manipulation, if you will. It does not prevent a government from engineering its own defeat. We've heard this explained as well this afternoon. Essentially, the Premier could walk down the hall to see the Lieutenant Governor.

As I've said, we're told when the next election would be. We know when. We don't know where. We don't know the boundaries, the borders that would be there. The member for Lanark-Carleton has used the term "gerrymandering," and I think it was with respect to this particular bill. Gerrymandering, as we would know, is the deliberate manipulation of a political border for short-term advantage, usually done by incumbents. This is not to be confused with something I discovered on a Google search. When I talk about gerrymandering, I'm not talking about the Gerry Mantaring Show, a Filipino national talk show. I don't know whether we could pull it in up here. You can find this on Google if you type in—

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): That's Jerry Springer you're talking about.

Mr Barrett: It may be somewhat akin.

You type in "gerrymandering" and a number of items come up. What comes up in that list is the Gerry Mantaring Show. It's a Filipino national talk show. It's on 1180 AM radio. It comes out of Houston, Texas. He spells his last name "aring." We're talking about "ering." I'm sure down in Houston some of the members of the Texas state Legislature would probably get a kick out of the Gerry Mantaring Show. It provides—this is from their radio advertising piece—"a stimulating, bilingual discourse on the issues of the day in both English and Tagalog." I can't get that station, but I thought I'd throw this in. Be careful what you find on a Google search sometimes.

Gerrymandering—it's found in the past and there is a long, storied history of gerrymandering—is most effective in electoral systems with districts that elect a single representative. There's a few hints on how to do it.

One form of gerrymandering occurs when the boundaries of a constituency are changed in order to eliminate some area with a high concentration of people who vote in a similar way; for example, for a certain political party.

A second form of gerrymandering is when an area with a high concentration of similar voters is split among several districts, ensuring that the party has a small majority in several districts, rather than what normally would be a large majority in one district.

This can be a good thing. Often such gerrymandering is held to redress a long overlooked imbalance. For example, there are cases, probably a number of cases in the United States up until recently that I'm aware of, where this kind of gerrymandering is used to help create a black majority district in the United States.

Thirdly, gerrymandering has been used to gerrymander a person right out of office. This may be a case where that particular elected representative has fallen out of favour with his leader, and come the next election, finds himself literally out on a limb, as far as those lines that are drawn on the electoral map are concerned.

There's one story that holds that the term "gerrymander" is named for an early Massachusetts Governor, Eldridge Gerry. Apparently two reporters were looking at the newly redrawn election map for Massachusetts, and one commented that one of the new districts looked like a salamander—obviously four legs; as I recall, salamanders have a tail. The other reporter retorted that in his mind, keeping in mind that the name of the Governor of Massachusetts at that time was Eldridge Gerry, it looked like a Gerrymander, and the name stuck.

I haven't done a lot of research on this. Perhaps the clerks know a bit more about British history on gerrymandering. They know all about it. I assumed it came out of Britain.

In the Republic of Ireland in the mid-1970s, the minister for local government, a fellow named James Tully, attempted to arrange constituencies to ensure the governing National Coalition would win a parliamentary majority. His attempt to gerrymander came to be called a Tullymander.

I've said that we're pretty sure we know when the next election is. We don't know where. That's up to Dalton McGuinty. This legislation gives no indication of the Liberal plan for boundaries. Let's only hope the government is not accused in the future—I hope this doesn't happen or doesn't come up for any good or fabricated reason—of any gerrymandering, Daltonmandering or McGuintymandering. This is not the kind of tradition we have in the province of Ontario. I would expect that we will not see this in the future.

In the two-minute hits, one of members made a bit of a pitch for a private member's bill. In view of what I've observed as voter cynicism in Ontario, I introduced in private members' hour legislation for recall. Again, this would be another option. The government of today was not very enthusiastic about recall legislation. Recall, very simply, would give the people of Ontario that opportunity, at any time between elections, through petition, issuing of a writ or a referendum, to have the ability to recall an individual elected member, or, in the way that we constructed that particular piece of legislation, would also enable people to recall the Premier of Ontario.

Just to wrap up, I support fixed election dates provincially. I support fixed election dates nationally. Over the next three and a half years in this Legislature, I'll certainly look forward to seeing how this progresses.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1801.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
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York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 9 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 9 juin 2004

The House met at 1845.

VISITOR

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): I want to acknowledge the presence of a former member of the Legislature, Mr Doug Reycraft, who served as the MPP for Middlesex in the 33rd and 34th Parliaments. Welcome, Mr Reycraft.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (HOURS OF WORK AND OTHER MATTERS), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (HEURES DE TRAVAIL ET AUTRES QUESTIONS)

Mr Bentley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 63, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to hours of work and certain other matters / Projet de loi 63, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne les heures de travail et d'autres questions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): The Minister of Labour has the floor.

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): I will be splitting my time with the member from Thornhill, Mr Racco; the member from Mississauga West, Mr Delaney; the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, Mr Parsons; and the member from Oakville, Mr Flynn.

I'm pleased to be able to take part in the second reading debate on this important legislation, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2004, with respect to hours of work and certain other matters.

This government made a commitment to the people of Ontario to end the 60-hour workweek introduced and passed by the previous government. We made a commitment to restore a worker's right to choose—a right which has long existed in legislation in this province—whether or not to work more than 48 hours in a week. This government made a commitment to support that worker's right to choose, to make sure it was given effect.

We are taking a fair and balanced approach to this determination. We are determined to protect the vulnerable, but we are also determined to do so in a way that will ensure that the businesses of Ontario have the necessary flexibility to compete nationally and internationally.

The legislation I will address in a moment will ensure that before a worker covered by the Employment Standards Act works more than 48 hours in a week, he or she first of all will choose to do so, and second, the employer must obtain permission from the Ministry of Labour, and only then, only when those two events have happened, can the worker work more than 48 hours in a week, up to 60.

Les employés dévoués de l'Ontario méritent pouvoir concilier une vie professionnelle et une vie personnelle riches et valorisantes.

La législation adoptée par le gouvernement précédent a fait en sorte que certains employés étaient trop préoccupés par le travail pour refuser à leur employeur de travailler jusqu'à 60 heures par semaine. Aucun mécanisme de surveillance gouvernementale n'était en place pour appuyer le choix des employés. On avait aboli, sans trop se préoccuper de la façon dont les personnes vulnérables pourraient faire valoir leur droit, un mécanisme de protection fondamentale qui était en place depuis des décennies.

That is the key point. What the previous government did was to remove ministerial oversight. What they did was to remove the essential protection that had been in place for decades in the province of Ontario, an essential protection that exists for the vulnerable workers, those who do not effectively have the power to choose on their own in the workplace. They removed that protection without any apparent thought to how those vulnerable workers would be protected in the future. We made a commitment to restore the protection. That is exactly what this legislation does.

1850

This is not a small issue. Estimates are that over 466,000 Ontario employees worked 50 hours or more in a week in 2003. That's an enormous number of workers in Ontario, and it is probably an underestimate. Those are the ones we can count and track. The fact of the matter is that the most vulnerable in our society are difficult to track.

After announcing our government's intention to end the 60-hour workweek, we did something that is characteristic of this government: We spoke to the people of Ontario about the most effective way to do it. We spoke to numerous business organizations, numerous labour

organizations, legal clinics, to the people of Ontario about how to most effectively protect the vulnerable, while at the same time giving business the necessary flexibility.

What was announced when we introduced this piece of legislation for first reading was a three-pronged approach to protecting the vulnerable: First was the introduction of the legislation, but that is not standing alone. Second was an enhanced awareness initiative to make sure that businesses and workers are aware of their rights and their responsibilities. Third is an enhanced enforcement initiative to make sure the rights enshrined in legislation are actually protected and enforced, as they must be. I'll address each of those in a few moments.

As a result of our consultations, we did not go back to the old system. That's important to note. The system before ESA 2000 was very paper-intensive. It provided for certain block permits. It was characterized by time delays in application. It was characterized by a burdensome bureaucracy. It was also characterized by the fact that many businesses didn't obtain the permits. So the essential protection that needed to exist was not there as it should have been.

What we did in listening to business and labour was to come up with a system where businesses will be encouraged to apply on-line. It will be user-friendly, speedy and efficient, and yet it will create the necessary protection for workers. In order for a worker to work more than 48 hours in a week—up to 60 in the future under this system—the worker must agree in written form. We will provide simple, standard forms outlining the worker's rights, in which the worker can indicate to the employer that he or she is prepared to work.

But that is not it; that is not the end. The second essential part of the protection: The employer can then apply to the Ministry of Labour for approval to work more than 48 hours in a week, up to 60. The application will be reviewed by the director of employment standards. The director of course will be looking for prior employment standards violations, prior occupational health and safety violations, or other issues of concern. Thirty days after the application, the employer can commence the work of more than 48 hours in a week, subject always to the director of employment standards being able to step in to vary, amend or rescind the permit that was granted.

This is the type of protection that is required. It is also a protection that can be granted in an expeditious way. The Web-based application process picked up on comments by the chamber of commerce and the CFIB, which did not want a paper-intensive process, but wanted one that could be done expeditiously. So this picked up on some essential comments made by those organizations to make it as easy to use as possible.

We are also reintroducing oversight for overtime averaging in this legislation. Overtime averaging has existed for decades. This is not a new thing. What the previous government did was to say that overtime could be averaged for up to four weeks without ministerial oversight. We have eliminated that and gone back to a process where the business has to apply to average overtime for any number of weeks. That's a protection that existed, as I said, for decades. We have restored the protection.

It should be remembered that in talking about the 48-hour workweek, that of course is not the standard workweek in Ontario. The standard workweek is 40 hours a week, as it is in most other jurisdictions in Canada. But what has existed for decades is the right to work longer, and what has existed for decades is the protection that those who do not wish to work more than 48 hours in a week will have ministerial oversight. That was eliminated by ESA 2000 by the previous administration. We are restoring it. It's an essential protection for the workers of the province.

But we need to do two more things to make sure the vulnerable in our society are properly protected: first of all, the awareness initiative we introduced. The vast majority of businesses are either doing the right thing or are trying to do the right thing. The fact of the matter is that no matter how greatly enhanced enforcement is, we rely on businesses to comply with the law.

We want to make it easier for businesses to find out what their rights and responsibilities are. Our awareness initiative will involve a Web-based information portal. Businesses will be able to easily find out their rights and responsibilities on Employment Standards Act issues, and eventually Occupational Health and Safety Act and other issues as well. A business that can easily find out its rights and responsibilities is much more likely to comply. That's one half of the equation, and once again we have picked up on suggestions made by organizations such as the CFIB and the chamber of commerce.

The other part is making workers aware of their rights. Many of the most vulnerable in our society do not speak English or French as a first language; it is in fact their second. We're aware that if you're going to fully protect people, the place to start is making them aware of their rights. So what we are determined to do is to make information available in languages other than English or French, in a number of different languages, and again, make that available to workers where they work or where they live in a much more accessible form. So we are going to partner with legal clinics, community organizations and others to make sure that this type of information, in a user-friendly form, gets to the workers who need it and where they need it. That's the awareness initiative.

Let's talk now about enforcement. The problem is that there hasn't been much, and that means there hasn't been much of a deterrent to businesses that may choose not to become aware of their rights or responsibilities, that may choose not to comply with their obligations. This is not a recent phenomenon. This is not something I will lay solely at the feet of the previous administration, because the fact of the matter is that for at least 15 years, and maybe longer, the act has not been enforced as it should be.

The fact of the matter is that the act contains very powerful tools; they just haven't been used. We know that rights without remedies don't remain rights for long; remedies that aren't used are not remedies at all; and in the Employment Standards Act we have remedies that simply have not been used. We're changing that. We're changing the dial on enforcement. Enforcement's back in style. We are going to be much more proactive in our enforcement process.

1900

The third prong of our determination to protect the most vulnerable in society is to actually make sure that (1) we encourage proactive inspections, instead of simply being reactive; and (2) where appropriate, we use all the tools in the Employment Standards Act, and that includes the prosecutorial tool where the facts and the law would otherwise justify it.

That has not happened in the past. For example, last year the Ministry of Labour processed approximately 15,000 claims. There were only a few prosecutions. Once again, that's not something I will lay simply at the feet of the previous administration, because in the early 1990s it was no different: very few prosecutions. It is simply a tool that has not been used. Unfortunately, this tends to send a message to one and all that there is no consequence for not complying. There has to be a consequence.

In summary, this is a piece of legislation that fulfills our commitment to the people of Ontario, our commitment to the vulnerable workers in Ontario, to end the 60-hour workweek. It is a piece of legislation that makes sure the vulnerable in society will be protected, but they will be protected in a way that allows business the flexibility to compete nationally and internationally.

It's a piece of legislation that will be supported by an enhanced awareness initiative for businesses and workers, and supported by an enhanced enforcement initiative that will make sure that the Employment Standards Act and this new piece of legislation, if passed, will actually be enforced for the protection of all workers in society.

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I stand to speak in favour of Bill 63, a bill that has been introduced by Minister Bentley. This bill, as has been said, will fulfill one of the commitments the Liberal Party made during the last election. This is one of a number of commitments we made and are delivering on as soon as possible.

When the bill was introduced, people in Ontario had been significantly upset. Many people in industries such as the construction or manufacturing industries were significantly upset about such an untoward action by the Conservatives.

In my opinion, this bill is going to allow employees who wish to work more than 48 hours to have the full freedom to make that choice. We know there are many individuals in our province who, unfortunately, must work for a number of reasons. If they have a choice to work extra hours they don't want to work or be fired, they're going to choose to work those extra hours because they cannot afford to lose a job. As a province, it is our responsibility not only to be fair to the people, but in particular to make sure that employees of this province will have a condition of employment that will make them feel comfortable and make them be even more efficient, because when conditions of employment are acceptable to the employee, the employee will be able to work harder, with more interest, and therefore do better for himself or herself, but also for the company he or she is working for.

We know that in our province, on a yearly basis, there is about $3 billion to $5 billion that are considered to be lost because of people not showing up to work. The majority of the reason is that those employees may not feel comfortable going back to do their normal work. Of course, by giving the employees more freedom to choose, certainly that will make them feel more comfortable in what they are doing.

This is a bill that should be supported by all of us. Again, it doesn't necessarily mean that those people who want to work more than 48 hours cannot do so. They will be able to. It's a matter of their having the opportunity to say yes or no. At the same time, the ministry has the authority to make sure that if some industry or company is going overboard, the ministry will be able to have some say on the matter.

This change in legislation will provide more prosperity for our province. The people of Ontario want to be able to decide if they want to work more than 48 hours. Again, we know very well some industries where working more than normal is very dangerous. Unfortunately in the past, and at present, we've become aware of incidents while employees are working. One of the reasons those incidents happen, and unfortunately sometimes even lives are lost, is because employees are not able to cope with the pressure of the job—for instance, if you choose the construction industry, where significant pressure is sometimes put on employees. Quite often English is not the employee's first language and they don't have a significant command of that language. Unfortunately, they are the first ones to pay the price of such an injustice in the marketplace, in employment.

Our government wishes to support employees' choices. That was fundamental protection that existed for many years, until the Conservatives made the change. Of course, we intend to go back to what's fair for employees, and what's fair for employees is fair for the province and for all of us. Of course the existing rule, until we make the change, is not right. It is not fair and we intend to make that change.

As the minister said very clearly, the employee will still have the opportunity to decide if he or she wishes to work more than 48 hours. Those decisions will be based on the conditions of employment, but also of the employee, and I think it's the right thing to do.

I thank you for listening to my comments.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I rise today to speak to Bill 63, a bill that amends the Employment Standards Act to protect the most vulnerable of Ontario's workforce.

Bill 63 restores the traditional rights, taken away by the previous government, of the choice of hours of work. The essence of change in Bill 63 is that the practice whereby an employer could mandate a 60-hour workweek is gone. New Canadians in particular will benefit from the fairness and the clarity in Bill 63. Indeed, one of the priorities expressed by the Ministry of Labour is to ensure that information on this measure gets out to Ontarians whose first language is not French and not English.

New Canadians face the challenge of getting established in a new country, where the language and customs are often strange. Those who come to Canada from parts of the world where democracy is neither as strong nor as vibrant as it is here in Ontario tend to fear and respect without question the laws of the new country. If the law says that an employer can require an employee to work 60 hours, then many new Canadians look upon such a law as a condition of simply remaining in Canada, even though a 60-hour workweek costs them their family life, their relationship with spouses and children, their personal time to relax and refresh, and often their health, both physical and mental.

Many people might say, "Well, if you don't like the hours of the job, then just go work someplace else." But it's not that easy. If you're a newcomer to Canada, you may not be as mobile as a mainstream Canadian. Depending on your country of origin, it may take six months to a year to learn to read, write and speak English well enough to capably look for another job. You may depend on someone who speaks your language and understands your culture to get in the door and collect a paycheque in the first place. You may feel indebted to that person, and it's a dependency that Bill 63 makes illegal to exploit.

If you bring workers into your place of employment, you can't do the equivalent of demanding six 10-hour days per week and say that the practice is perfectly legal, even if that's the way things were done in your country of origin, even if that's the way other people say they do it in your workplace. Six 10-hour days often mean about six hours of sleep, perhaps another hour of commuting each way here in the GTA, 10 hours of work, maybe a total of two hours per day to shave, shower, dress and look after lunch and other personal needs, leaving perhaps four hours per day to look after family needs, maintain a relationship, shop, look after household chores and to find time for yourself. It's a grinding existence; it's hardly a life.

1910

Many business owners, managers, and certainly those in this House are familiar with 60-hour workweeks. But there's a difference, and that difference is called choice. Most of our Ontario business owners and managers don't try to coerce or even ask their employees to spend 60 hours a week at work. It's been said that business owners get the workforce and the labour unions they deserve. Enlightened and generous treatment of one's workforce is not just the right thing to do but, as measured by any comprehensive set of performance metrics, it's also the most profitable thing to do as well. But not every business owner is enlightened. Not every business owner or manager sees productivity and profitability as consistent and collective goals in collaboration with their workforce.

Last year alone there were 15,000 claims against employers for violations of the Employment Standards Act. And according to the statistics, one—just one—prosecution was started. There's very little downside for cheating. I like to look to the best in people, in communities and in companies, but to say that only one of 15,000 companies truly warrants prosecution stretches even the sunniest optimist's credibility. That's why enforcement is back in style, and tougher enforcement against those who refuse to co-operate and operate responsibly, tougher enforcement against those who prey on their workforce, and tougher enforcement on those who use unethical practices to try to gain an unfair competitive advantage in their market.

I say to someone who may be watching this statement tonight, ask a question if you think your employer is taking unfair advantage of the men and women in your workforce. Let's talk about your rights. Should Bill 63 receive passage, you must agree in writing if your employer wishes you to work more than 48 hours in any workweek. You cannot be required to work more than 48 hours in a week. You have the right to refuse a request to work more than 48 hours in a week. You cannot be pressured otherwise. Your employer must ensure that employees like you understand your rights.

An employer can no longer abuse a provision called averaging. Averaging currently means that an employer can average work hours over a period of four weeks, with the written agreement of employees. This potentially reduces the amount of overtime that must be paid. Under Bill 63, an employer must now apply to the Ministry of Labour for permission to average overtime hours.

Your employer must give each employee an information sheet—produced by the Ontario Ministry of Labour and not the employer—that describes your rights about hours of work and overtime pay. If your first language is not English or if some of your co-workers read or speak a language other than English or French, there's a very good chance that the information from the Ministry of Labour is available in your first language. If your employer or employee representative cannot or will not provide this information in your first language, call the Ontario Ministry of Labour after this bill has passed and ask to receive information in your first language. There's a good chance that such information will be available.

I say to companies that Bill 63 is an act with teeth. Offenders can be fined as much as $100,000 for a first offence. A repeat offender faces a fine of $250,000 for a second offence and $500,000 fines for a third and subsequent offences. Many people who have spoken or written to me on the abuse of hours of work invariably say that there's one or a few specific individuals who organize who works, and for how long. This is especially

true if a workforce consists largely of workers for whom English is not the first language and who may be new to Canada.

I say to you, as workers, that if a specific manager or other individual is shown to violate workers' rights or coerce workers to work longer than 48 hours in a workweek, then that person can, on each count, face a fine of as much as $50,000, or as much as 12 months in jail, or both.

I say to employers that if you're running a clean company and you're treating your workers well, then Bill 63's main benefit to you is that you have a level playing field. No competitor can squeeze their employees and, in so doing, cut corners or cut costs and gain a price advantage over you, thus penalizing you for operating ethically. As an employer, you know that employees who are routinely overworked or undercompensated make mistakes, give rise to wastage and are a safety hazard to themselves and those around them. You can be more secure, with Bill 63, that an unscrupulous competitor cannot so easily pass along the costs of an overworked or tired employee to the taxpayer through WSIB claims or to OHIP charges.

Your managers need the flexibility to adapt to changing business circumstances. That's why you can file for permission from the Ministry of Labour in four separate ways: on-line, by fax, by mail and in person. You can also expect a timely response. There is no filing fee. The forms are simple and useful.

Ontario needs our best companies helping our workforce prosper as they grow and doing profitable business. Bill 63 says to our companies in Ontario that the unscrupulous firm will not be rewarded for taking the money from their workforce and running. It's a big marketplace, and there's lots of room in an open and fair marketplace, lots of room that Bill 63 fosters. If you want to buy a luxury car with your company's profits, we wish you well. Just help your workforce spend time with their families. Help them earn a fair and living wage and perhaps buy themselves a basic car to park beside your luxury sedan in the company parking lot. It's the right thing to do, and it's fair.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): As the other speakers have said, I am very pleased to speak to Bill 63. I was present in this Legislature when the initial bill was introduced that we are now repealing, and it struck me that our bills have been different from the bills from the previous government. I know the obvious answer is "Good bills, bad bills," but it's even more complex than that. The previous government thrived on omnibus bills, bills that put a whole lot of unrelated things together, and in many cases took a really good thing hostage and made it into a really bad bill.

If I'm remembering right, the bill that dealt with making employers able to force employees to work up to 60 hours also included legislation that provided for a year of family leave for employees who had adopted or given birth to a child and wanted a year off. There was a desire certainly on the Liberal Party's part at that time to make it match the federal government legislation, so they put the 60-hour workweek together with the one-year family leave—

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): It made it look like we were against it.

Mr Parsons: Yes—and then said, "The Liberals were against the family leave," when in fact I think our philosophy was that a 60-hour workweek destroys family life. It has a very detrimental effect. As I recall, we voted against it. So I'm particularly pleased to see this bill. In fact, thinking about all the bills that have come from this government—they've been nice, clean bills dealing with an issue. This is a labour-related issue dealing with the matter of overtime calculations and hours of work, and there's no hostage in it. I compliment the minister on that.

1920

When the other bill was passed by the previous government, I received some phone calls of concern about it, and, I'm proud to say, not a lot of phone calls, which said to me that most employers were doing the right thing, that they were working with their employees to make sure that they had a family life, that they worked in a safe environment, but I did receive some. Interestingly, one call was from an employer who was concerned about some of my comments in the media that 60-hour workweeks weren't going to be endorsed by all the employees. He called me to tell me how happy his employees were that they were now able to make more money and were thrilled. It was, "Please don't say negative things about the bill," because his employees were really pleased that they now could be scheduled for 60 hours.

Most of my other calls were, ironically, from his employees, who said, "We're now being made to work hours we really don't want to work, and it is becoming apparent to us that, yes, we have the right to turn down these extra hours, but then we seem to get called in for fewer and fewer shifts as time goes by. We weren't fired for it, we weren't penalized for it; we just weren't getting called in to work." I thought it amazingly ironic that the calls essentially all originated from one area.

This won't change life for most Ontarians because I think employers are responsible, but it certainly will for some. As I recall, 25 or 30 years ago, if you read Popular Science, it talked about the life of leisure we were going to live. Everything was going to be done by robots, cars were going to drive themselves down the highways, and everyone would be working two- or three-day weeks. I would like to suggest that we have a more stressful life now rather than a less stressful life, as they predicted. Thanks to cellphones and the BlackBerry and economic pressures where both partners are working, life is much more high-paced and sometimes moves too fast.

Here we're fixing a bill that I would suggest had a very detrimental effect on family life. Where both individuals in a relationship are working, the children very clearly miss them, and they miss the children. If we start to talk about 60 hours a week, family life suffers. It's as simple as that. I don't think I'm telling anyone in this

chamber something they don't already know. Sure, you can average the overtime out, but for 60 hours, if someone is working that week, the children pay a very dear price for not having the quality time with their parents that a 40- or 48-hour workweek would permit.

This bill, for a whole lot of reasons, and I just referred to one, is good because it will allow and improve quality of family life for families that put a priority on that, as virtually all of them do. We live in a difficult era financially. We've seen gasoline prices; we see a lot of things putting pressures on.

The answer put forward by the previous government was to have people work 60 hours. I find it strange that they were saying, "We're going to give people the opportunity to earn more money," when at the same time they flatly refused to increase the minimum wage. I'm very proud that one of the first things our government did was to start to implement the increase in minimum wage. Working 60 hours at the previous government's minimum wage wasn't the solution to the economic problems. The solution was to start to pay what is a fair wage.

I'm very pleased about the way this bill will make workers more aware of their rights. As an engineer, I worked from time to time in construction, and the reality in construction is that many of the people employed in it speak neither English nor French. I think of one gentleman who said to me that when he emigrated to Canada he found out three things fairly quickly: One was that the streets aren't paved with gold; second, he found out the streets aren't even paved; and third, he found out he was supposed to do the paving.

For many of our first generation who come to Canada, they work in the construction field and they have very limited access to our laws in their language. I applaud this. They're good people, hard-working, often not well educated, but hard-working, solid citizens who are in a new country. I've never experienced that. It's got to be unsettling to move to a new area and be unsure of your rights and unsure of the laws. Again, I applaud the minister for saying that this government will provide to them in their language the rights they enjoy this country.

One of the reasons I believe we're all Liberals is because it doesn't matter where you're from or who your family—

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): We're not all Liberals.

Mr Parsons: Well, not everyone, but the ones on this side and in that little corner over there—actually quite a large corner. We know that it doesn't matter where you come from; you're a Canadian citizen, you're one of us, and we're going to work with you as an equal.

The other aspect of dealing with construction is, if you're working on construction, your very life often depends on that next person. If you've driven by a construction project—they can be very dangerous places. We have laws to make them safer, we have inspections to make them safer, but if I were involved in highway construction, where they're replacing parts of storm sewers or they're placing concrete slabs, I wouldn't be happy if I knew that the individual operating the crane had worked 60 hours that week. Much of the work on the highways is done at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, if you'll notice. If that individual has worked 60 hours a week and he or she is lifting this slab that weighs four tonnes above my head, I don't want a fellow employee who is physically exhausted, just to save a few bucks on the overtime hours.

The provision in the previous bill that's being repealed with this was rather diabolical. Under the current legislation, which this bill, if passed, will replace, overtime hours were averaged over four weeks. So you could have someone work 60 hours and not make any extra overtime, and that gave a real incentive to employers if they wanted to go to 60 hours.

But they are physically tired and putting other people's lives, their own lives and their family's lives at risk. If a parent dies, it doesn't matter if there's insurance; it doesn't matter if there's financial compensation. The loss to the family is absolutely irreplaceable. Now people will have the right to say, "I don't think I'm safe. I don't think I can physically do it." I know they could do that before, in theory. But as I said earlier, the people who talked to me certainly felt that if they didn't do the hours, they weren't going to keep the job or they weren't going to keep the hours that provided a living for them.

This bill is such an improvement over what existed before, where paperwork had to be filled out. Ten years ago, the Internet didn't exist to any great degree. I was invited to an event this evening in Belleville, which naturally I can't attend. My wife is going to be there. It's a senior citizens' home where they have all just completed an Internet course, and now they can e-mail their grandchildren. It's just a way of life for us. Now the ministry has said, "We recognize this technology." An employer can apply for a permit on the Internet, as simple as can be. The employees can learn their rights on the Internet, as simple as can be. The bill has recognized the new technology and recognized that people need to be informed. Maybe the one thing that showed up in the Science Digest of 25 years ago was that we'd have better information-sharing, and we very clearly do.

As I said, I applaud this bill. I think it makes it a safer place. I think it makes it a more humane place. I think it makes a better place for our families. I absolutely cannot see a downside, so I am intrigued as to the comments that could possibly be made. It may be the role of the opposition to find something wrong with this, but industry has applauded this. Family advocates have applauded this bill in recognition that it is a return to the kinder, gentler Ontario that the electorate clearly wanted last fall.

I think it was in 2000 that the bill that changed this was passed, if I'm remembering correctly. Each time I did a phone-in show in the years after that, this was an issue that would come up, from perhaps just one caller, but it was very clearly still an issue and families were distressed by it.

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As I conclude, this is another bill that makes me very proud. This is another promise that the Dalton McGuinty

government has delivered on, and it is a commitment that we have delivered to the people of this province that we will enhance your quality of life, we will make life safer and we will make life fairer. The citizens of Ontario expect nothing less than to be treated as individuals. This bill ensures that they have some control over their working days, they have control over the number of hours and they have control over the overtime.

The last thing I would say before I sit down is that I appreciate the minister's commitment that there will be enforcement. There is nothing worse than passing legislation that has no enforcement. I can think of some of the changes, again, over the previous government's time. I can recall an evening here in the House when it was incredibly hot because the air conditioner wasn't working and it really wasn't safe to work in here. And I can recall Mr Kormos saying that he had phoned the Ministry of Labour and the inspector had said, "Well, it doesn't sound hot over the telephone." That's a system we had gone to, that you had to describe an unsafe condition over the phone. That isn't the way this government, this Premier, this minister is going to deliver it. We're not going to make it safe on paper; we're going to make it safe in the real world for our citizens.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It certainly is a pleasure, on a hot and muggy, smoggy night in Toronto, in a hot and muggy chamber, to be able to speak to what I think is a wonderful piece of legislation. It's like a breath of fresh air in the room to be able to speak to this. I certainly am pleased to be able to take part in the second reading debate of what is the proposed Employment Standards Amendment Act (Hours of Work and Other Matters), 2004, Bill 63.

The past decade has been, I think we all know, a time of change and challenge and stress for Ontario workers and their families to make ends meet. Days are getting longer. People are working harder, longer hours in those days, and consequently spending a lot less time on their personal and family lives. What I think they're looking for, besides a source of income and a source of satisfaction, is some balance in their lives. They're looking to be able to earn a living in this economy. They're also looking to be able to spend some of their free time with their family, with their children, with their friends. Lifestyle is becoming as important as our economy, in my opinion, and I think that's a good thing.

As we pointed out when we introduced another bill, Bill 56, we're finding that caregiver strain is also a factor in our modern lives, and that's due in no small part as well to the difficulties of trying to balance a work or an employment life with the demands of caring for a seriously ill loved one, someone who is perhaps in the last days of their life.

Sadly, there are also a lot of other crucial events, personal responsibilities, family matters that get short shrift if a worker is spending more time than he or she really wants or really should at their job. When you think of the quality time that you need in this day and age, in this age of technology, to raise your kids properly; when you think of the activities in the community—you think of Scouts, you think of sports, you think of the people who put time in, the volunteers—and you think, if you're driving home after your fourth 12-hour shift, do you really want to go and stand on the sidelines with the little kids on the soccer team, or do you prefer to just go home and fall asleep? It's a question that I think a lot of minor sports organizations are finding themselves asking. With such issues as gridlock, commuter time, time spent on the job, it's getting harder and harder to attract volunteers into the minor sports world, and that certainly has an impact not only on the sports organizations themselves, but it has an impact on our community as a whole.

So this stress has not been good for the health of the workers. It hasn't been good for the loved ones and their family. And it's particularly hard if a worker feels he or she hasn't had a choice, or somehow is being coerced into working those long hours that they truly did not want to work. It's especially appalling if the worker did not even know that they had the right to refuse. We have found that that is the case in some workplaces in Ontario.

It's a question of choice. It's a question of responsibility between an employer and his or her employees. It's how we fulfill a contract. The employee agrees to work the contracted number of hours, and then, if he or she so chooses, has the ability to work the extra hours to earn the extra income, up to a legislated maximum. But the key words are "if they wish; if they choose to do so."

We're finding, because of the lack of enforcement in the past, that there have been examples of where employees have been coerced into working hours that they simply did not want to work. That has had an impact on their lives. That has had an impact on their families.

We know that problem exists because the Minister of Labour has received letters from individuals who have said they did not feel free to decline their employer's request for them to work those extra hours, when they would have preferred to be with their families. We also know this is a big problem because some of our stakeholders have been rigorous and very diligent in bringing this to our attention. As we've been doing our consultations on this bill, that has become clear.

In my opinion, as a result of the previous government's legislation, some employees have been too worried about their jobs and their job security to say no to an employer's request to work up to 60 hours in one week. There was no governmental oversight, no enforcement to support that employee's choice, had it been made. A fundamental protection that had existed for decades in this province was effectively removed simply by its lack of enforcement.

There's also a question about whether some workers who aren't proficient, perhaps, in either English or French may or may not be conversant with the workplace standards that we hold dear in Ontario. We wonder if they really understand what those standards are and we wonder if they really understand what their rights are.

Employees in Ontario, in our opinion, must be able to freely choose if they want to work more than 48 hours in

a week. Otherwise, that control that we all seek in our lives, that balance between our personal lives and our work lives, is lost; it means nothing. How can we expect them to cope with the difficulty that life brings when they're under this pressure constantly to work excess, and perhaps even illegal, hours?

That is why the government has introduced changes to the Employment Standards Act, 2000, that would, if passed, end the 60-hour workweek. We want to ensure that employees have a real choice of whether to work extra hours. That protection would be balanced with Ontario's workplaces' need for flexibility to remain competitive. This change, in my opinion, would be good not only for the employees but also for the employers in Ontario.

We, in my opinion, have been a government who has listened, and we've listened in this case. We've heard from business and we've heard from labour.

As a government we're investing in education, in skills training, in our youth, our young people and our schools. Those investments are the future of this province. It's very simple: Young people with the best public education simply get the best jobs.

We're investing in a strong and growing economy in Ontario. Just look at the recent job growth figures for evidence of that.

We're investing in first-class health care in Ontario. Ontario is becoming the province that it once was: a province that people can be proud of again.

By supporting this bill, you are bringing balance back to the workplaces of Ontario. I don't believe we're ripping up any contracts as we introduce this bill. We're bringing back freedom of choice. We're improving and enhancing economic growth and employee morale in Ontario.

When you've got strong, fair and balanced legislation such as Bill 63, in my opinion it's the hallmark of a vibrant, civilized and dynamic economy where business and labour work together. By supporting this bill, you help put Ontario business and labour back on top of the world, where it belongs. That's why we've introduced changes to the Employment Standards Act that would, if passed, as I've said, end that 60-hour workweek.

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We want to ensure that employees have real choice. The protection has to be balanced. Ontario workplaces need the flexibility to work excess hours from time to time. We need to maintain that flexibility to remain competitive. In today's work environment it's becoming very difficult for many workers to find that balance.

I say to you that Canadian workers and businesses are among the hardest-working and the most productive in the world. Somebody mentioned Oakville a few minutes ago. I'm proud to say that the Ford plant in Oakville, in my community, is one of the most productive automobile assembly plants, not just in North America but in the world. That's why investment makes sense.

What we don't need to affect that productivity are some of the estimates of direct and indirect costs of absenteeism in Canadian workplaces. Due to high work-life conflict, some of those costs could be in the billions of dollars. The increasing need for elder care and the care that we need now for our seriously ill family members has sometimes even led people to the point where they have had to quit their jobs in order to look after family members. We all know, from talking to Bill 56, that according to a recent study of cancer patients, more than 40% of family members of patients surveyed had to quit work simply to care for those family members.

Employees with better control over this conflict are healthier workers. Employees who feel their personal lives have some value and consideration are much better workers and are more productive. They have less absenteeism. They are more likely to feel loyalty to the workplace and to their employers if they feel they're working in an atmosphere of mutual respect. All good employers and high-performing workplaces know this. Some, unfortunately, do not.

This bill will not impose undue hardships on responsible business, so you see, it's not only employees who would benefit; employers would benefit from this act, if passed. Workplaces would be healthier. They'd become more productive. The environment, the morale in that workplace, would simply start to soar. Healthier, more productive workplaces simply mean a better bottom line and a more profitable environment for Canadian and Ontario businesses.

Productivity is not just the hours you work. It's the productivity that you're able to achieve during those hours. How efficient is your operation? How safe is it? Is there an atmosphere of mutual respect that exists between yourself, as the employer, and your employees? You have that atmosphere if you try to foster that atmosphere, as this bill is trying to do. It can't help but lead to increased profits and better productivity.

This bill deals with the freedom of choice around what's called overtime averaging. As in the case of overtime hours of work, government oversight of overtime averaging was a protection that was largely removed by the last government. Averaging an employee's hours lowers the amount of overtime pay employees might receive for a week's work. We are restoring the requirement that ministry approval first be obtained for any averaging of any extra hours.

We must ensure that employees are agreeing to the averaging of their own volition; we need evidence of that, not because they think if they don't, they will lose their jobs or will somehow be treated differently at work. We won't stand for that.

This proposed bill is part of a comprehensive strategy that we think will bring about real change in employment standards and employment practices in Ontario. It's a change that will benefit both employers and employees—all workplace parties.

The first element of this strategy is obviously one of education. It's to raise the awareness of employment standards, rights, obligations and laws amongst both employers and employees and those who provide sup-

port, advice and guidance to these parties. It is especially important that we reach new businesses. It's especially important that we use every method of technology and communication that's available to us to support that task.

It's especially important for us to reach small businesses. Many small businesses, in the hectic day of trying to operate a small business in a competitive climate in Ontario, sometimes simply do not have the knowledge or even the awareness that such standards exist, may not even know what an employment standards law is and may not have the resources—-a one-man, a two-, three- or four-person operation—that they could go out and either research that knowledge base or increase their own knowledge. It simply isn't user-friendly at the present time under the present system. It's especially important to reach vulnerable workers, those who are newcomers, those who may not have a great command of either the English or the French language, and those who often work in unstable workplaces.

The Minister of Labour intends to do this with new, well-planned and compelling communication tools, such as the Internet, publications and direct outreach. It would do this with simple-to-understand and very easy-to-access, user-friendly information. It's going to do this by partnering with agencies and organizations that can help to deliver the information to businesses and the people we must protect in a way and in a language they can understand. We also have a strategy to raise compliance levels by pursuing enforcement in a new way.

We take the trust that Ontario workers place in the Ministry of Labour very seriously in this government. This legislation is the right thing to do. This legislation is the right step to take at this time.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): As I understand it, this amendment bill, Bill 63, doesn't actually reduce the workweek. It certainly doesn't reduce the paper burden on an employer. The question remains, what will be the increased bureaucratic cost of implementing this particular scheme? From what we can see, it obviously results in at least one more form to be filled out, and that can lead, worriedly, to further rules and regulations and red tape.

Of course, on this side of the House we feel that there was nothing wrong with the system established by the former PC government in the year 2000 with our legislation. The bill does very little to change the relationship between an employer and an employee in relation to hours worked.

The Liberals have advertised this as bringing an end to the 60-hour workweek and that this was somehow imposed on workers by the previous government. In fact, 60 hours remain, and now to achieve these hours, the employer complies with these regulatory requirements.

A couple of winters ago, I was hosting a New Year's levee at my farm. It was on a Sunday. A heavy snowfall came in. My house is on top of a hill and I needed an awful lot of sand in a hurry, because I had dozens and dozens of cars sliding up and down that laneway. I phoned my neighbour who has a trucking company, a backhoe company, and his 12-year-old or 13-year-old son answered the phone. I apologized for it being Sunday and wondered if I could talk to his dad. This kid figured me out right away. He came right out and said, "I'm not afraid to work. I'll be right there."

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): It's an interesting bill that this government brings forward, because they're saying, "We love labour." They're trying say in this bill that this government wants to put its arms around the labour movement and say, "We love you. Please, come and be our friends because we're going to help you." The problem is, as the Liberals wrap their arms around the house of labour, labour is finding out that it's a pretty uncomfortable hug, because when you look at what's in the interior of the bill, it's actually no different than what the Tories already had.

Interjections.

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Mr Bisson: I say, if I'm wrong—excuse me—then line up all my labour friends outside who are supporting you on this particular bill. I look at Wayne Samuelson, who speaks for the house of labour, the president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. I know it well; I used to work there. I worked at the OFL for a couple of years. As you know, the Ontario Federation of Labour is the house of labour, where labour meets in the province of Ontario and comes together on issues of policy. Wayne Samuelson, the president, along with other labour leaders, is saying that this is a joke. We asked this government to bring forward progressive labour legislation to deal with the onslaught of attack that we've had from the former Tory government, to try to undo some of the regressive rules that they've done around the right of workers to organize. What more fundamental right do we have as citizens of this province if we don't have the right to associate? You may like or dislike a union; that's beside the point. We have a right in the Charter of Rights to associate, and if people want to become members of a trade union, that is their right. Is there anything in this bill that deals with the rights of workers to organize or to ban scabs in the workplace? Absolutely nothing.

So I say, you can hug the house of labour all you want. At the end of the day they're feeling kind of squeezed and not too loved by the hug, because it's kind of sticky and ugly.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): The MPP for Timmins-James Bay was going through a little bit of a historical analysis. I'd like, with your permission and the permission of this House, to actually share with you some thoughts on the NDP record regarding labour in this province.

The MPP for Timmins-James Bay quoted Wayne Samuelson. I'd like to counter that by actually quoting Sid Ryan, a former CUPE division president, a former NDP candidate, an erstwhile and ever-ready NDP candidate, it seems, for any level of government that might present itself. He says, "I'd like to say tonight that I'm ashamed of my party, the New Democratic Party. I

will never forgive you, Bob Rae, for what you have done to the working men and women of this province." For your mutual edification, that was listed in the Toronto Star—

Interjections.

Mr Qaadri: I can see that you're upset, gentlemen. Licensed as I am to prescribe tranquilizers, I'll be pleased to offer them to you afterward. Nevertheless, the record stands that the NDP government, when it had the chance in 1993, actually tore up the contracts of almost 900,000 unionized workers, despite their protests to the contrary.

I would like to say, just in the closing few seconds, that this particular bill our government is bringing forward respects the labourers of Ontario, respects the employers of Ontario, and is a definite move forward. I would like to salute the Minister of Labour, the Honourable Chris Bentley, for not only introducing this bill, but the minimum wage increase and others.

The Acting Speaker: One further question and comment.

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): Now that the noise has died down, I hope we can get back to Bill 63, which is the bill presented before this House. I was most interested to hear the comments of the member for Oakville.

This bill really doesn't do a lot, after my perusal and reading of it. What it does is increase a certain amount of bureaucratic red tape. It brought to mind the fact that when we're dealing with topics of this kind, we no longer have to look at Canada or even the free trade zone of Canada and the US; we have to look at the world in general. There are competitors in the world that will be competing with the fast-diminishing industrial jobs that both Canada and the United States now employ. In the United States, there has been a lot of news lately about offshore outsourcing of jobs, service jobs for the most part, but we always must be concerned with industrial jobs.

The words "red tape" may be somewhat misleading. It's just more bureaucracy, and we have to watch out for that. When I was in China on a social trip two years ago, I was impressed with the industry of the people. I was saddened by the pollution, but the people there are most industrious and hard-working. That, in a sense, is our competition, because their wage rates will compete, and what we're going to have to do is compete on the world market, rather than strictly North America. That voices my concern for this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Labour has two minutes to reply.

Hon Mr Bentley: I'd like to thank the members for Haldimand-Norfolk, Timmins-James Bay—the member for Etobicoke North in particular for his kind comments—and the member for Cambridge for their comments. But I'd also like to thank those who spoke after me in the main part of the debate—the member for Thornhill, Mr Racco; the member for Mississauga West, Mr Delaney; the member for Prince Edward-Hastings, Mr Parsons; and the member for Oakville, Mr Flynn—for their very supportive words about this legislation.

This is an important piece of legislation. It is important not just for one stakeholder or another; it is important for all of the people of Ontario. It recognizes that in our society there are people who are more vulnerable, who do not have equal bargaining power, who do need support in making the essential workplace decisions, such as whether they wish to work more than 48 hours in a week. It recognizes protections that have been in existence in Ontario for decades, protections that were in existence under Bill Davis, under John Robarts, protections that existed and were recognized for decades, and that were thrown away by the previous administration. Most importantly, they were thrown away without any apparent regard for the protection of the most vulnerable. They were left to fend for themselves.

We're restoring protection of the vulnerable and, in fact, enhancing that protection through the awareness initiative, to make businesses and labour aware of their rights and responsibilities, and, through an enhanced, beefed-up enforcement initiative, to make sure the essential rights that are enshrined in legislation are actually protected, because rights without remedies are not rights for long.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I do believe we have unanimous consent to defer the leadoff speaker for the Conservative Party to a future date.

The Acting Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed?

Mr Hardeman: It's with pleasure that I rise to speak to Bill 63, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, with respect to hours of work and certain other matters. We've heard a lot in the last hour from the government as to why this bill was introduced and what it's going to do, and from some of the questions and comments following that hour presentation, it became quite obvious that no one can really explain, or at least the one-hour explanation didn't explain to those of us listening, what the purpose of the bill is.

I can tell you what it isn't: It doesn't end a 60-hour workweek, which is purported by the government. I had a feeling that this was going to happen, so I did try to research and find out why the Minister of Labour decided to introduce this bill. If you look on the ministry Web site, you find a lot of good stuff there to explain what this bill does, and it obviously explains it far better than what we were able to get in the first hour of the presentation.

This is a news release from April 26, 2004: "Legislation being introduced today would, if passed, require employers to apply to the Ministry of Labour and obtain an employee's written agreement to work more than 48 hours in a week. It would end the 60-hour workweek created under the previous provincial government." What's interesting, of course, is that the 48-hour workweek has always been there. It's there under the present legislation, it was there prior to the present legislation, and it will stay there under the new legislation.

Under the present legislation, if an employer wants to go to the 60-hour workweek, he can do that with the

consent of the employee. So we have a written consent from the employee, we have the consent from the employer, and together they agree that they are going to work up to a 60-hour workweek without getting ministry approval. For anything beyond that time, they have to apply to the ministry.

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What this act really does, the only thing it does that requires legislation, is to change the 60 down to 48 where they have to send in applications to get approval from the ministry to go to the higher workweek. From the discussion we heard from across the way, everybody was talking about the detriment of working 60 hours a week. But obviously this legislation does nothing, absolutely nothing, to curtail the number of hours people can agree to work. As was mentioned, if it's highway work, running the crane, isn't the great concern that the person running the crane may have worked too many hours in the last week and he's not going to be as attentive as he should be? That doesn't change with this legislation.

There must be a purpose for this legislation somewhere. I go to the same news release and I find the things they're going to do through this legislation: "Providing businesses with Web-based information so they can easily learn about their rights and responsibilities, ensuring compliance with the ESA." I'm not sure, but I don't think it requires a bill in this Legislature for the minister to put that information on the Web site so employers will know how they have to comply with the Employment Standards Act. I think most employers would be able to do that, as we speak.

Mr Barrett: It's like driving a tack with a sledgehammer.

Mr Hardeman: I'm not sure there's a tack down there. That sledgehammer's coming down, but there's no tack.

"Getting information to those whose first language is not English or French": Again, I hope the minister doesn't believe he needs legislation to be allowed to send information to employers who have employees who speak languages other than English. All that can be made available. They do not need legislation to do that.

"A streamlined process for quicker turnaround and file closures": I see nothing in this bill that does anything of the sort. I don't even know what that one means. I'm sorry.

"Dedicated resources to investigate alleged violations and prosecute where warranted": Incidentally, they're going to prosecute the Employment Standards Act, from what I read in the bill. I thought that's what they were doing already. If the Minister of Labour believes he's not doing a sufficient job in doing that, he should get on with doing it. You don't need a piece of legislation to say: "I know what my job is, but I think I'll just have a piece of legislation so the Legislature can tell me again what my job is and then I'll see if I can do it."

This is just what I'm reading from the ministry news release: "'The law as written contains the enforcement tools; they just need to be used,' said Bentley. 'Last year, there were more than 15,000 claims against employers and only one prosecution was started. Starting today, enforcement is back in style.'"

I commend the minister for the comment, but the legislation he's talking about here is not the legislation that he introduced but the legislation as it presently exists. From that, I guess I have to assume that the minister believes the present legislation is sufficient to do the job; it just needs enforcement.

One area in the bill that I find very interesting is the business of—for whatever reason, the minister believes that if the employer hires three more people and does a lot more book work, they can then send all this information to the minister, and that will give the ministry the opportunity to check back on it for enforcement purposes. It would seem to me, if we have the enforcement capabilities, as he suggests in some of the other background information, we can enforce the present agreements, remembering that all the people who have an agreement signed between the employee and employer have an agreement that can be checked by the ministry at any given time.

The minister made the comment that the employers were very happy with this bill because we were going to have on-line capabilities in order to send in our applications and get the information back expediently. The only reason that employers I've talked to think that's OK is that the option was dealing with the mail system, and that would take months to do. They said: "If we have to do it at all, then on-line is the way to do it." So it's not to suggest that the employers think this is a wonderful idea; they don't. But what they do agree with is that if we're going to do it, we need to do it in the most cost-effective manner possible, which of course is on-line.

Another thing I have is a fact sheet sent out by the good minister—sent out the same day, incidentally, upon the introduction of this legislation. It has some examples to interpret how the act will work.

Example 3: "Sami is starting to work for a company that would like him to work nine hours a day for six days, for a total of 54 hours per week. Sami agrees to provide his written agreement for these hours." We have a situation where Sami wants to work and the employer wants him to work, and they've both signed an agreement. It sounds like what they call a match made in heaven. It's working out for everyone.

Now, this is the study on it: "Sami's company applies to the Ministry of Labour and says their employee has agreed to work these hours," which of course is true. "The ministry reviews the application and discovers the company has a history of contravening the Employment Standards Act. The Ministry of Labour decides to deny the employer's application based on its history of noncompliance with the act."

Well, that's a great punishment for the company, but it does absolutely nothing for Sami. He wanted to work the overtime, and now he can't. It seems to me it would make more sense to have the Ministry of Labour inspectors go in there and enforce the Employment Standards

Act on the employer, as opposed to saying, "No, you keep doing business as you're doing it. Just don't allow your employees who want to to work more hours. That wouldn't be good, because you're already in contravention of the Employment Standards Act as it is and we wouldn't want to give you other privileges."

To me, that would just be counterproductive to the employee, as opposed to the employer. Again, I don't think the act does what it's intended to do.

Another thing that bothers me a bit is that the information for the applications must go to the Ministry of Labour. The act says that the power to approve can be delegated to anyone in the Ministry of Labour, and that the employer must make sure they keep all the information on record, all the agreements and even the application that was sent in, so that when the ministry comes to check they can check the employer's information as opposed to the information that was sent in. I guess there's some concern that once it gets to the Ministry of Labour, it's going to get lost, so they want to make sure that there's an archive somewhere to house this information. If we can't be sure that the ministry is going to be able to salvage the information as it arrives, it seems somewhat redundant to me that they would see fit to ask the employer to present it.

As I said, the government is purporting that this act is going to end the 60-hour workweek. As everyone in the House and I think most people watching would know, when you have a statute such as this, the first part of the act is primarily definitions and gives the reader of the document some idea as to terminology in the legislation and so forth. This legislation is no different from that.

Subsection (8), on the first page, says, "An employer shall retain or arrange for some other person to retain copies of every agreement that the employer has made with an employee permitting the employee to work hours in excess of the limits set out in subsection 17(1) for three years after the last day on which work was performed under the agreement."

That's what I just spoke to earlier, that the employer must maintain records that deal with the situation.

It takes all the way to page 3 before we get to the point where it says a 60-hour workweek is still legal. It comes in clause 17(4)(i):

"the employee's hours of work in a workweek do not exceed any of,

"(i) the number of hours specified in the application,

"(ii) the number of hours specified in the agreement, and

"(iii) 60 hours."

So in fact, by the time we get to page 3, we've reached the exact same point that we were at in the previous legislation. So what this amends is only more paperwork, more bookwork, between the employer and the Ministry of Labour.

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I heard a lot of discussion across the aisle that a lot of people don't know their rights and that they're being coerced into working more than their 48 hours a week, that they don't know they can say no. The problem I have with that is that I see absolutely nothing in this legislation that changes the relationship between the employee and the employer prior to the employer asking for the ministry's approval. The employer would ask the employee if they're willing to work the 60 hours, and "If you are, sign on this line here." Then that piece of paper would go in the application going to the ministry. The ministry would then, at that point, decide whether on that information they would grant the approval to allow the 60-hour workweek. I didn't hear anything suggesting they had a plan that would change that process. If the individual did not understand it under the present structure, I see nothing in here that changes why they would understand it under this bill. Again, I see absolutely no benefit to that.

When we look at the purpose of the bill, what it really comes down to, as was mentioned by almost every speaker from the government side, is, "It is the government keeping a promise." I suggest that it is the government bringing in a bill in an attempt to keep a promise that, if it were kept, would be very detrimental to our economy. They promised to get rid of the 60-hour workweek, and there are a lot of people, large industries and small, that would have great problems with not being allowed in any way to make arrangements with their employees to work beyond the allowable 48-hour workweek. Rather than blatantly do nothing and say, "We couldn't keep our promise," they're bringing in legislation that doesn't keep the promise but does give the opportunity to stand up and say, "We're going to change the wording. We're not going to get rid of the 60-hour workweek; we're going to change the legislation that allows employers and employees to negotiate up to a 60-hour workweek."

A lot of my constituents like the flexibility of being able to bunch the hours in longer weeks and then have longer continuous periods of time off. I commend the government for bringing in legislation that doesn't stop that from happening. I hope that as these applications go to the ministry, the ministry would approve them, where an individual says, "Yes, I don't mind working three 60-hour workweeks and then have two weeks where I don't have to work at all. My personal lifestyle is centred around that, because my spouse or significant other works a similar situation and we can then have more time off together. I think that's a wonderful idea."

The minister spoke about the following: If the employee agrees in writing with the employer, they would apply for permission, and if in 30 days they had heard nothing back, they could then implement it; then, if 60 days later they heard that permission was not forthcoming, they could quit doing it. This seems like an appropriate way of dealing with it, because when this legislation comes into effect on January 1, 2005, when all the applications for these extensions come in, I think we're going to see a lot that don't have a reply within 30 days. In fact, with the experiences we've had with birth certificates and so forth in recent times—I'm sure, Mr Speaker, you've had your problems in your constituency office—the wait gets to be quite lengthy.

As this new program is set up, I'm sure the minister will make every effort to be expedient, but I don't think it's unreasonable to assume that we're not going to fall within the 30 days to reply to each of them. I think he said it was 15,000 where they were found lacking in the past year, with only one prosecution. If 15,000 are lacking, an awful lot of people must have these types of arrangements that are working very well too.

Incidentally, the legislation does point out that each and every one of those from October to December must get ministry permission to continue doing it in January 2005. I question whether the minister has the wherewithal in the ministry at present to look after that many applications coming through in that short a time.

There really is no way of dealing with the short-term need to do this. In my part of the country, we harvest tobacco, as was mentioned by the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant. If we need agreement for that, if we haven't got it within 30 days—in fact, I suppose the tobacco growers would hope they wouldn't get it in 30 days, because in 45 days it would be over and it really wouldn't matter whether it was approved or not. I'm not sure the timing works out in all cases, because they're not all going to be applying forever. A lot of them could be applying for a short time. I don't think they've dealt with that very well.

In another part of the bill—there aren't great changes, so I just want to touch on it lightly—is the averaging of overtime. That deals with people wanting to work more hours in one day and then having more days where they don't have to go to the job at all and can stay home with their children or do other things they like to do. But if they aren't allowed to average that overtime in an appropriate manner, employers cannot afford to make that arrangement to help them out with their personal lives. If they work 12 hours for three days and the employer has to pay four hours' overtime for each of those days, if they don't have the provision for overtime averaging, the employer would not be receptive to doing that. He could not ask them to work the 12 hours and not pay the overtime. It's very important that it's worked out properly so they can properly average the overtime, that by agreement between the employee and the employer to benefit both parties, they can arrange to work flexible hours and average it to a 40-hour week so we won't have people not being able to do that.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): First, I want to thank any audience we still have who are watching and listening to us at 8:15 this Wednesday night. You are an incredible, committed group of people. Maybe the batteries are simply dead on the clicker and they're not inclined to get up and turn it. Or, heck, with the new television sets, you don't even know how to change the channel on the set because you're so clicker-dependent. Soon, at 8:30, we're going to start competing with prime time. Quite frankly, prime time isn't what it used to be, with the reality shows and what have you. This is reality. Really, this is like Survivor. It's a matter of who's first, second, third and fourth off the island. It is.

I'm going to be speaking to the bill for our one-hour leadoff in around 10 minutes' time. There are some serious problems with the legislation. I am going to consider them and ask the government to consider them and, quite frankly, ask the government to question whether this bill, in its present form, should even proceed to a second reading vote or whether it should go to committee so that some of those fundamental flaws can be addressed.

Far be it from me to doubt the sincerity of the minister, but the bill doesn't do what the minister claims it does. I don't think the minister is naïve, but I suspect his enthusiasm to get a bill before the chamber may have resulted in some draftsmanship that will leave working women and men out in the cold at the end of the day.

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So, folks, give us 10 more minutes. I'll have my chance to address this bill. That will be the balance of the evening here at Queen's Park. I'm going to speak to the bill and a few other matters related to the bill.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): The intent of my two minutes is to comment on my friend from Oxford. I think he got lost somewhere along the way with the details—so complicated.

I think we forget the whole reason that our minister put this bill forward. I believe—I know—that the bill is to better our society, not only the employees but the employers. I think we're here to give some guidance to the workforce and to set some rules. For example, we have speeds on our highways. I know we all obey those speeds, but we need some guidance, whether it's 100 kilometres or 80 kilometres. I think that's what this bill reflects: to give some guidance to both the employee and employer.

On a personal note regarding the importance of having some regulations for our workforce: My father was an immigrant to this country. When he came 40-odd years ago, he worked in construction, like most other immigrants who built this province of ours. He worked 40, 45, 50 hours a week because he wanted to care for his family. I don't think for a minute that the employer took advantage. There just weren't any rules, and we need to control that.

The intent of this bill is to protect the employee, of course, but it's also to give some guidance to the employer that somebody is watching. I'm sure the majority of employers abide by the rules, but we have to have some rules in place. We just cannot have a free-for-all. As we heard, this is not new. Other governments in the past had it. Unfortunately, the last government in the last eight years felt that it wasn't worth it, but that's not what we're hearing. That's not what I hear on the street.

I'm going to support this bill wholeheartedly. It makes a lot of sense. We need to move forward.

Mr Barrett: The member for Oxford has pointed out that employers aren't particularly enthralled with the Employment Standards Act and the attendant bureaucratic burden. However, in one small way, the use of electronic communication is felt to at least help out a bit with

compliance and enable them to make the best of what's coming from a new government here, try and, I guess, get through the next three and a half years. They now know they have a target of October 4, 2007, if they can last that long.

I guess the fact remains, and has been pointed out, that people can still be working 60 hours a week. It's still legal, in contrast to some of the conventional wisdom that is being attempted to be communicated or massaged by this government in support of this legislation. However, as was pointed out, the relationship between the employee and his or her employer really hasn't changed. The question remains—and I haven't heard the answer across the way—what has changed? As the member for Oxford points out: not much, certainly not hours worked. No change in hours, and this in spite of a Liberal election promise to get rid of the 60-hour workweek. This is what I was hearing in my neck of the woods during the past election. We detect a continued trend here, a trend of not only broken election promises; we're seeing a trend now, believe it or not, of broken post-election promises. I sincerely hope this legislation isn't contributing to that trend.

The Acting Speaker: One last question and comment?

Mr Bisson: In a few minutes my good friend Mr Kormos from Niagara Centre will have an opportunity to speak on this bill.

Interjection: No.

Mr Bisson: Yes. He's going to speak on it, and I'm sure everybody is going to tune in and watch.

But I have to point something out. The bill itself, as you take a look at it—now, I have to admit I've only had a quick look through the bill and I haven't read it in detail as I normally read other bills; I haven't had a chance to get around to it—from what I've seen of the bill and the briefing notes we've received on it so far, the bill basically does nothing different than the previous bill. That was the whole point of the speech by my good friend from Oxford.

If you take a look at the bill, it's a little bit semantics. Some people say to-may-to; other people say to-mah-to. That's about what it amounts to in this bill. At the end of the day, we still have a longer workweek that is possible by way of this bill compared to what it was when the Liberals first came to office or when the Tories first came to office. So I fail to see how this is a progressive bill for working-class people; I really do.

Quite frankly, Ontario has looked at this issue backwards. If we look at European economies, their approach has been quite different. They've been saying, "How are we able to figure out ways to reduce the workweek, not increase it?"

If you take a look at the European economy, it's doing better than North America. Just compare what's happening in the economy of Europe when it comes to the value of the euro to the American dollar and the Canadian dollar. They're doing far better. But they have progressive labour legislation; five weeks' holiday in the first year of service in France, Germany and other countries. They have shorter workweeks. They have a whole bunch more benefits, a much more participatory approach when it comes to labour and management. There's more co-operation between the parties because the state makes sure that happens. I'm just saying, this legislation doesn't go anywhere in that direction. If anything, it takes us in the direction of the United States and Mexico, and that's certainly not the direction I want to go. I want to see a progressive North America when it comes to labour legislation. This certainly doesn't do that.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Oxford has two minutes to reply.

Mr Hardeman: I want to thank the members for Niagara Centre, Northumberland, Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant and Timmins-James Bay for their fine comments. As was mentioned by the member for Timmins-James Bay, what it comes down to is this legislation does not change the ability to work a 60-hour week in Ontario.

The minister mentioned that the old system was too cumbersome. Let me tell you that this new bill does nothing to alleviate the paperwork and the redundancy that existed in the old one. This one just puts that all back to the Employment Standards Act of 2000, and I believe that's wrong.

The main thrust of the government members as they spoke to the bill was, "It was a promise that we made in the election campaign, and we are keeping the promise." Nothing could be further from the truth. There is absolutely nothing in this bill that deals with the government keeping their promise. Their promise was to eliminate the 60-hour workweek. This bill does not do it, and I think this is just right out: "We are not going to keep the promise to get rid of the 60-hour workweek. I think we can chalk it up on the loss side again. We didn't tell the truth about getting rid of the 60-hour workweek to the people—to get elected. We are not going to do it now, because we know it would be bad for our economy."

I want to thank all the people who participated, and thank you for providing me with the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member for Niagara Centre.

Mr Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. I appreciate the chance to do the leadoff on behalf of the NDP. I want to commend you, first of all. You've been sitting in that chair since 6:45. I may have been distracted for a minute or two, but I haven't seen you take a single break. I've been in and out of this chamber. You've been drinking water as if it's going out of style. I want folks to know that you've earned every penny of the Deputy Speaker's stipend. Furthermore, as Speaker, you've listened to everything that everybody has said since 6:45 pm.

I'm going to speak to the bill. Oh, I wanted to get a couple of things out of the way first. I want to alert this chamber to the fact that the Deputy Clerk, Ms Deller, served upon me earlier today a notice of motion that has been tabled by this Liberal government; that is, the notice of a time allocation motion to cut off debate, preclude

effective committee hearings and all but eliminate third reading debate for Bill 83. I find that disturbing and shocking.

2030

I've been here long enough to see the escalation of the utilization of these statutory time allocation motions. I sat here and worked in this chamber when Liberals were sitting there and when they joined New Democrats in expressions of outrage and disgust at the previous government's utilization of time allocation.

I want to explain to you briefly, Mr Speaker, because you're younger than most folks here. There was a time when there were no limits on speeches in this chamber, well within the lifetime of many of the staff working for this assembly. During that time, there were similarly no provisions for a statutory time allocation; that is to say, time allocation pursuant to the standing orders. What would happen is that debates would take place, and there would be, from time to time, what I call a common-law closure motion, inevitably by members of the government once there had been, in their view, thorough debate.

A Speaker would determine whether or not that motion was in order, and if the Speaker determined that the motion was in order, and from time to time the Speaker determined that it wasn't in order, that there hadn't been sufficient debate to warrant a common-law closure motion, then the Speaker, if he determined it was in order, would put it to a vote. Inevitably there would be a vote and debate would end.

That was before there were limits of one hour on lead-offs. That was before there were 20-hour limits on back-bench participation in debate. That was before—

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: As the member across is not speaking to the bill that's before this House for debate, could we bring him back?

The Acting Speaker: We are debating Bill 63. I would ask the member for Niagara Centre how these comments are relating to Bill 63.

Mr Kormos: I'm putting Bill 63 in context. It's important to lay the groundwork.

I also want the House to know that I've been advised that Deputy Clerk Deller, whom I spoke of just a few minutes ago, is celebrating this year her 25th year of service to this Legislative Assembly.

Do you understand what that means? Norm Sterling and Jim Bradley were baby-faced, neophyte members when Ms Deller started working here. Ms Deller knew the two most senior members of this assembly when they were but wet behind the ears. Ms Deller had to guide those two now most senior members, both with 27 years' service, through the most fundamental—page after page—of standing orders. Mind you, the standing orders were far more transparent when Ms Deller commenced her career here; in fact, there was far more utilization of precedent of the common-law practice of convention.

Congratulations to Ms Deller. I trust that the government House leader will be engaging, at some appropriate point, in a more formal acknowledgement and recognition of Ms Deller's service and perhaps recognizing it with the appropriate gifts—a watch, something in the Rolex lineup, perhaps writing instruments. There's a Mont Blanc shop up on Bloor Street at the end of Avenue Road. There are any number of things that would be totally appropriate.

A time allocation motion—it is reprehensible that a budget bill as contentious as Bill 83 is, flowing from a budget that is as contentious as this budget was, a budget that has reduced Mr McGuinty to poll support of but 9%—and when you think about it, if there's one of those 4% to 5% margins of error, where does that put him? Heck, if he drops down to 5% and there's a 4% to 5% margin of error, he could be on negative turf, negative ground. I told you the other night about those outlaw bikers with "1%" tattooed on their shoulders; I'm going to see Liberals showing up with "9%" tattooed on their biceps perhaps. They'll be part of that exclusive club of 9%ers.

I think it's beyond disappointing to see a time allocation motion before even one year has passed in this government's tenure here at Queen's Park. Make note, and I warn people, that there will be virtually no committee hearings. There will be but a total of four hours allowed for public submissions, and some of that time will inevitably be occupied by introductory submissions by the minister and/or his political flacks or by bureaucrats from the ministry. There will be a time allocation, of course, on the committee so that all amendments will be deemed to have been read. And then, when the bill comes back to the House, there will be but, oh, not even enough for one complete rotation of third reading debate, and then the vote shall be put. That is reprehensible. That is an incredible offence to the people of this province and to the members of this Legislature.

I want to talk about Bill 63. But just to get to where I'm going, I read the June 9 Windsor Star, today's Windsor Star, and saw the comments made by MP Susan Whelan, who of course comes from some significant political and Liberal pedigree. Ms Whelan says, "I've never made the kind of promise that Dalton McGuinty did.... He owes the people of Ontario an apology for what he did." Ms Susan Whelan, Liberal MP and candidate, telling his folks, telling the people of Ontario, telling the people of Canada that Dalton McGuinty should apologize for what he did.

Well, I say Dalton McGuinty should apologize for bringing in time allocation motions as well, now that he's being called upon to apologize. He has got a lot to apologize for. The regrets and the apologia would occupy a big chunk of time in this House and in this chamber.

Quite frankly, if you're going to have apologies, I'd say to the minister that there should be some apologizing for Bill 63, because Bill 63 promises to do something that it doesn't really quite do, and workers are going to find themselves sorely disappointed. I was here, along with more than a few other folks, when a former Minister of Labour, one who, as I understand it, still owes the taxpayers some $7,000 that he promised to pay back after ripping them off on a junket in Europe—

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Well, it was the tour of the world's capitals on the taxpayers' tab. He did. Seven grand was only a piece of the action; that was chump change, a couple of days of limo service. But he promised to pay it back. We still haven't seen that money paid back. As I recall, it was around seven grand. Am I wrong, Mr Duncan? Anyway, it was the former Minister of Labour who ripped off the taxpayers.

Look, when you think about it—talk about chump change; Stockwell and the public purse—you've got this guy Guité, who's presumed innocent until proven guilty, and he's only charged with $2 million of the $250 million, according to Ms Fraser. There's still $248 million to account for and there are still a whole lot of charges to be laid. And then you've got Conrad Black stealing left and right from Hollinger, with Babs Amiel like a wheelbarrow behind him, throwing the goodies in. I'm still ticked off at John Roth from Nortel, because I figure he did a number on that company.

I just have this fantasy about some of those federal guys with the Adscam being charged and getting convicted if they're guilty, and then John Roth and maybe Conrad Black all sharing a cell. They could all take turns wearing the tube top and the miniskirt. Think of it. Conrad Black would be going for something far classier than that, though, I'm sure. But those guys should be bona fide cellmates.

The Acting Speaker: Would the member for Niagara Centre please consider some of his comments before he makes them.

2040

Mr Kormos: Speaker, I appreciate your direction, but thieves belong in jail, you surely agree with me. Quite frankly, thieves deserve to undergo all the indignities that jail has attached to it. Conrad Black has proven himself a thief. Babs is, as I say, with the wheelbarrow behind him picking up the loot. John Roth has certainly ripped off more than a few shareholders of Nortel and stolen jobs from thousands of Nortel workers.

Again, on the Adscam, as I say, we haven't had any convictions yet and everybody is presumed innocent until proven guilty, right? But I'm eager to see the lineup as they do the Millhaven shuffle, waiting for their prison garb and their cell assignments. It will be a sight to be observed. It will be something for the news reportage of the day, won't it?

Look, Bill 63 is going to disappoint a whole lot of workers. Talking about disappointment, let me tell you about a letter I got from one Mr Wilson. Mr Wilson lives down Stoney Creek way and he wrote me a letter. May 25 is the date of the letter. It's interesting, because he writes to me and first of all he indicates, "As a senior who has been driving for over 60 years and had only one violation, I would like the register a complaint about the recent car insurance rates." I phoned up Mr Wilson and said, "What about the violation?" Clearly, Mr Wilson is disappointed about the government's commitment and promise to reduce rates by 10% to 20%. I said, "The violation may well be responsible." He said, "No, that happened 45 years ago, when I was a young man." So I said, "Well, Mr Wilson, don't really concern yourself with the violation then. Don't get fixated on it. Trust me, the record of that Highway Traffic Act violation 45 years ago"—look at how integrous the guy is. He surely couldn't be Premier with that kind of integrity or those kinds of standards.

Here's a guy who is 80 years of age, as he told me, and he indicates that he'd been wooed over to one of these grey power type of insurance companies. In fact, it was a brokerage that specializes in seniors, a company called Allianz. He got a renewal policy this month—May, when he wrote this to me—a $700-plus increase in his insurance premium, over 40%. He couldn't understand, for the life of himself, how that jibed with the government's promise—you've got a point of order over here, Speaker.

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member for Welland-Thorold has been speaking for 15 minutes now and he has mentioned Bill 63 twice, in passing at best. Perhaps we could speak to the bill that's being debated tonight?

The Acting Speaker: I have certainly been listening, and I would again suggest to the member for Niagara Centre that he needs to bring his comments back to Bill 63.

Mr Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. I appreciate your guidance. I appreciate your direction. I appreciate your counsel. I appreciate your advice. As a matter of fact, it was interesting to see Mr Edighoffer up in the Speaker's gallery today. Mr Edighoffer was the first Speaker whom I served under here. I was telling Mr Wilkinson that I was pleased, because of course Mr Edighoffer was his predecessor. It was interesting, because it was only today that I made the connection between Hugh Edighoffer and Bert Johnson, who was a Speaker as well, an incredibly colourful one and, I want to tell you, one whom I miss. I really do. I miss Bert Johnson. I miss his unique style in the chair. I miss his wit. I miss his sense of humour.

Anyway, I was telling Mr Wilkinson, upon seeing Mr Edighoffer here—just let me digress for a minute, because somebody brought up about the Speaker. How it started was that I was acknowledging your authority, was submitting myself to your authority. I wanted to tell you that the first Speaker I was able to work under was Hugh Edighoffer, who was an incredibly disciplined person and an incredibly disciplined Speaker, but who permitted great flexibility. You see, he was disciplined but he wasn't a mindless authoritarian. This is a human place, and while the rules are there, the rules have to be interpreted in such a way as not to inhibit one's views.

Look, I appreciate that my style may appear cumbersome to some folks—I appreciate that—but if you're a contextual person, you're a contextual person. Some people are sort of linear thinkers—I think that's what they say in those books that they write about stuff like that—and other people have to build up the context.

What I'm trying to do, Speaker—and I appreciate that I may not be doing it as well as others could. I look forward to the chance, once my hour is over, to take my seat and hear others who are better than I am do it better than I do. I'm looking forward to that. What I'm trying to do is put Bill 63 in a context of disappointment, in a context of frustration, in a context of just a sense of disbelief around the fact that, can you believe anything these folks promise any more? Because they've broken so many promises.

We used to go after the Tories big time. We used to go after them around the titles of their bills. Remember that? The Tory bill titles would be very creative and oxymoronic from time to time. Now, the titles aren't what is oxymoronic about these bills; it's the substance. It's one thing to have a title that takes a little shot, but it's the substance. I was reading Speaker Jerome's memoirs, from up Sudbury way. I'm reading from the book. It's Speaker Jerome's book, published in 1985 by McClelland and Stewart here in Toronto. I'm reading directly from the book, and I put this to you: "I know you would find it to be a very grave question of privilege were I to describe my Liberal opposition as sewer rats, but I can't help wondering, if we were a Parliament of sewer rats, would it be a question of privilege to call one of them a Liberal?"

Please don't shoot the messenger. It's a direct quote from Speaker Jerome, who is an acknowledged authority on parliamentary procedure. I'm reading this book, and all of a sudden I stumble across a phrase that refers in such an unparliamentary way to Liberals as sewer rats. Please. I was shocked. How did this book get in our library? It comes from the Queen's Park library. I suspect it was maybe installed there while the Tories were in power, except the date of publication, surprisingly, goes back to 1985, the election of the first, well, sort of Liberal government, 1985-87.

Anyway, Speaker Jerome indicates that the rules are there, that the role of the Speaker is to know the rules—and you do; I commend you—but then to ensure that people still and nonetheless have their say in this Parliament.

I want to talk about Bill 63 in the context of the disappointment of Ontarians around this government. That's fair, isn't it? You may not agree with me; I understand that. You may not agree, but I surely am entitled to speak about Bill 63 in the context of a litany of Liberal—oops—promises that were broken. I almost got on one of those rolls of onomatopoeia almost: a litany of Liberal—it's easy to fall into that.

2050

Did you see the pamphlet that I saw? There's an entrepreneur selling T-shirts, and it's a mock-up of the Disney musical The Lion King. It was in town for quite a while. There's a fellow selling T-shirts of "The Lying King." You can telephone him at 905-840-5283. You can get a T-shirt in any number of sizes. The Lion King was Disney, wasn't it?

Interjection: Yes.

Mr Kormos: Yes, a Disney musical. Then, of course, there's a portrait of a high-profile political personality whose brother is running federally in an Ottawa riding on the front of the T-shirt.

Interjection: Tim Peterson's here. He got elected.

Mr Kormos: Federally.

I thought the guy was clever. Here's an entrepreneurial kind of guy—I have no qualms about entrepreneurial kinds of guys—who's selling these Lying King T-shirts—Lion King, I'm sorry—in all sizes. They're only $13, plus GST and PST, for $14.95. That's cheap. I didn't see the T-shirt. It's funny, it's clever, it's witty. His telephone number is 905-840-5283.

The reason I wanted to talk about that is the frustration of folks out there in the province around the broken promises. The minister comes here into this chamber tonight, and oh, boy, he's going to have second reading of Bill 63. He shared his lead-off with what seemed like a million other members, except we know there aren't that many Liberal members, even in this majority government. He purported to tell us that this bill was going to overturn what the Conservatives had done with their implementation of the 60-hour workweek.

People don't believe this government when they say it's going to overturn that 60-hour workweek. That's why I mention Mr Wilson. I'm going to wrap up with Mr Wilson and then move on to more of the guts, the viscera of Bill 63, OK? Mr Wilson writes:

"Re: car insurance rates

"As a senior who has been driving for over 60 years and had only one violation"—mind you, 45 years ago; Mr Wilson, please, they don't even have a record of that—"I would like to register a complaint about the recent car insurance rates.

"I was wooed away from my original insurance company by a well-known subsidiary in this area by offering lower rates.

"This month I received my renewal policy, which has increased well over $700."

"How can they justify an increase of 40%? Do they want to rid the road and highways of the elderly? Driving is just about all that is left for us seniors. My wife does not drive, so I am the sole driver in the household, which means several trips to doctors, optometrists, specialists, groceries etc, etc.

"They should remember it is the 'old' that is making the insurance companies rich. We built the roads and highways that the cars of today are running on.

"Hoping you and your party can reduce these horrendous ... rates!

"Hoping to hear from you in the very near future!

"Sincerely,

"Robert Wilson."

So I called him and, as I say, and got the details. His record has been impeccable for decades. Nothing has intervened—

Ms Smith: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's becoming perfectly clear to everyone in this House this evening that our esteemed colleague from Welland-

Thorold is not prepared to debate Bill 63, which is before the House, as he has now spent 25 minutes, and counting, on context. Perhaps we'd like to get to the bill, Mr Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I have allowed the member from Niagara Centre some degree of latitude in terms of his remarks, but I would ask him for a third time to bring his remarks back to Bill 63.

Mr Kormos: I appreciate that intervention. I take heart, because I know that at least the member is listening carefully to what I'm saying. She's not entirely inaccurate to point out that I, perhaps, have taken a little more time, but I've got a little more time than most, don't I? I've got an hour. God bless the folks in Hamilton. God bless the people in Hamilton East. I've got an hour. I don't have to deal with just 20 minutes, so you see, I can do the buildup. Other people can't. I get that extra time. So I'm building up to where I'm going.

Having read that Jerome memoir—and there are some other great Speakers—there's Mr Lamoureux, of course, whom I know you're familiar with, because we've cited him or referred to his rulings many times—and some great Speakers here in this chamber. I remember some very lengthy speeches I gave here in this assembly under the supervision of Mr Hugh Edighoffer, who was incredibly patient and who recognized the right, notwithstanding the frustration felt by other members of the House. I've got the floor. By George, I'm going to use it.

The government had better be very careful before it somehow suggests that they are eliminating the 60-hour workweek. You see, I'm at the 32-minute point, and now I figure the time is just right to get into the innards of Bill 63, if only for a moment, because I may find something there that takes me off somewhere else, but it doesn't mean that it's going to be unrelated.

Understand very clearly that this bill, this Liberal government's bill, this McGuinty Liberal Bill 63, reinforces the 13-hour workday with no permit or application to the Minister of Labour. Shocking, isn't it? This bill permits the 13-hour workday with no need for an application, never mind a certificate of approval, in the year 2004.

I was talking to some other folks here about that book The Jungle. Do you remember The Jungle, by Upton Sinclair? I think it was published back around 1906, about the meatpacking district in Chicago, about Lithuanian and other eastern European immigrants. I've read it several times. I read it most recently a few years ago and would recommend it to everybody in this chamber, especially as we talk about workers in this province, because as shocking as that book was—it prompted Congressional and Senate inquiries into work conditions and caused uproar in the whole meatpacking industry, especially insofar as it was a major exposé of inappropriate practices around health and safety, not just of the workers but of the consumer who was purchasing that meat.

Of course, all the meatpacking has moved southward, out of Chicago. Chicago does relatively little now. If you read the book Fast Food Nation, you'll read about that. That's about the impact of the big fast-food operators. McDonald's among others—because they're the big consumers of beef and chicken, right?—have shifted the whole production down into low-wage states, away from Illinois, away from Chicago.

Sinclair wrote about some incredibly atrocious conditions. He wrote about incredibly long workdays. He wrote about incredibly long workweeks.

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): Do you want me to get you water, Peter?

Mr Kormos: No, I've got another glass right here. I'm fine.

Upton Sinclair wrote about shockingly incredible and atrocious conditions.

Reference has been made during the course of the talk around Bill 63 to high-wage industrial workers and unionized workers. I've got to be very candid with you. Unionized workers are the clear minority of workers in this province and in this country. Quite frankly, unionized workers, by and large—I want to qualify it—have no need for an Employment Standards Act, and these are amendments to the Employment Standards Act. The Employment Standards Act creates minimum standards for workers who don't have the clout of unionized workers, who don't have membership in a trade union, who don't have the power of bargaining hours, workweeks, vacations and so on. So the vast majority of workers don't have contracts to rely on that are negotiated under the Ontario Labour Relations Act. They are dependent entirely on the Employment Standards Act. This is it. This is as good as it gets for them.

So we have a Liberal government that endorses 13-hour workdays? Shocking. We have a Liberal government that continues, by its very own legislation, to permit 60-hour workweeks even when approval has not been granted, as long as an application has been made? And the whole concept of voluntary participation in this scheme? Please. It's just so downright dishonest.

2100

Let's understand where the coercion comes from. The coercion comes from economic need. The coercion comes from an increasingly lower-wage economy as this province loses its high-wage, value-added industrial jobs. Look, what are the core value-added industries in the province of Ontario, in the industrial arena? Auto, ship, aerospace and steel, and all interrelated. I'm talking about manufacturing. We have pulp and paper production as well, and the rest are primary harvestings.

We've had a betrayal of workers in those four sectors by provincial and federal governments—the federal Liberal government with its failure to implement a clear national steel policy, even when the Americans invited Canada to do so in response to the dumping of steel into Canada and the United States by foreign steel manufacturers. The United States implemented tough tariffs which, quite frankly, were a compromise, as you well know, between Leo Gerard and the steelworkers and the UAW, because of the conflicting interests there. The auto industry wants lower-priced steel. Right? The steel indus-

try wants to maintain, which means the auto industry likes the competition from dumped steel sources, but the steelworkers want to see the North American steel industry sustained and want to resist all dumped steel.

So what has happened, because the Ottawa Liberals in Canada wouldn't follow suit with the Americans, and the Americans made it very clear that they would not be applying those tariffs to Canadian-manufactured steel? We've got a free trade agreement. But did Ottawa implement tariffs? No. So Canada now has become the backdoor entry point into the United States of dumped steel. By Canada's failure to develop a national steel policy, we have, in fact, aggravated the problem for Canadian steel manufacturers, and the proof is there. You don't have to travel very far from Toronto to see the proof—and a struggling steel industry throughout the rest of Ontario as well.

Look at what happens: When you have steel struggling, you've got pipe-making struggling. We have an auto industry where the Japanese manufacturers are now becoming, from month to month, depending upon the time of the year, part of the big three. We stand a strong risk of seeing one of the big three North American car manufacturers displaced in terms of auto sales by the Japanese.

It rots my socks every time I go out in the parking lot here at Queen's Park, knowing that everybody in this building is paid for on the public purse one way or another, either as a staff worker here or as an elected worker, and I see Japanese products or German products out there in the parking lot. It rots my socks that people are living off the public payroll and yet not supporting jobs for North Americans, for Canadians and their American sisters and brothers. It drives me crazy. Then people huff and puff about, "Oh, we need jobs for people in our constituencies." Well, then, try supporting those jobs and investing in them.

We've got an auto industry at risk here in North America. We've got an aerospace industry that's on the ropes. Howard Hampton and I have written to the Premier, asking the Premier of this province to participate in the same sort of role that the government of Quebec is with respect to the Quebec aerospace industry, by way of providing loan guarantees for purchasers of made-in-Ontario aerospace products, made-in-Ontario planes, among other things.

In fact, in the province of Quebec, because the Quebec government charges a commission, a fee, for acting as a guarantor, the government actually makes as small profit from doing this role, and it has proven itself to be a substantial and significant provoker of aerospace jobs.

Shipbuilding: I come from down in Niagara region, where Port Weller, one of the world's, and certainly one of Canada's, great and historic shipbuilding yards, is lying dormant, again, no thanks to Paul Martin, who won't even register his ships in Canada, never mind build them here.

We've got some real problems. We have seen, over the course of the last eight years, free trade and globalization do exactly what the opponents of free trade and globalization predicted they would do. We've seen the loss of good, value-added manufacturing jobs. We've seen an attack on the high-wage economy. We've seen a proliferation of low-wage jobs. We see a government that abandons minimum-wage workers by granting them a crummy 35 cents an hour after they've waited seven, eight or nine years and lost over 20% of their purchasing power. Thirty-five cents doesn't even begin to bring them up to par.

Why do people work hours in excess of 40-hour workweeks? Because they have to, because economically they have to and because we don't have a government here that's interested—I was going to say "any more," but it never was—in maintaining a high-wage economy. How short-sighted. Because we have as federal fiscal policy the maintenance of high levels of unemployment, (1) unemployment is seen by the banks, amongst others, and by the owners of capital, the big owners of capital, as an effective hedge against inflation, and (2) high levels of unemployment are seen as a way of keeping the wage rate down, because when you have a huge pool of workers competing for scarce jobs, you then have the sort of competition that keeps wage rates down, which ties directly into the inflation rate.

You talk to—I have never talked to Mr Greenspan down in the United States, but you see Mr Greenspan reporting to the American government. When there are shifts in unemployment levels, that gets Mr Greenspan's attention real fast. When employment rises—that is to say, unemployment drops—Mr Greenspan panics, because he sees that as having an inflationary impact with the risk of driving wages up. He sees that as a negative thing. When employment levels increase, we see stock markets become depressed. Stock values drop. Investors panic when they see people getting jobs, because that eliminates this pool of unemployed workers who will compete with each other for lower and lower wages. Similarly, it would have a real impact on the willingness of people to work hours in excess of 40-hour weeks. If there weren't these huge pools of unemployment, we would have wages rise to their appropriate level and we would have less need for employers to use workers in excess of a reasonable, or 40-hour, workweek.

Why do we not want workers to have to work 60- or 70-hour weeks? My concern is that the legislation, Bill 63, may not even cap it at 60 hours. If you read section 4 of the bill, which will be section 17 of the act, one very valid interpretation of it is that the only time there has to be a cap of 60 hours on a workweek is if it is one of those caps that you can require the worker to work up to without getting a de facto approval from the Ministry of Labour. In particular, take a look at clause 17(4)(i), where it's very clear that the only time 60 hours is going to be the ceiling is when you're calling upon a worker to work in excess of 48 hours and up to 60 without getting clear, specific approval; that is to say, a certificate or a licence from the Ministry of Labour.

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I want to speak to the notification of rights, and in particular section 1 of bill, which will amend or replace

section 2 of the Employment Standards Act. It is naïve for this government to somehow say that notice will be in English or, hopefully, French unless a majority of the workplace is of another language, and then information will be provided, or may be provided if it's available, in that other language. That's of no comfort to the worker who's in a minority in the workplace whose language is neither English nor French. What the government is saying to that worker is, "Your rights are irrelevant." The government is saying that it, the government, has no interest in the rights or welfare of that worker.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: I heard somebody say, "Point of order," over here; Ms Smith said, "Point of order," but now she's leaving. It's like a hit and run. She goes, "Point of order," and then she skedaddles.

Interjections.

Mr Kormos: No; if you're going to do points of order, you've got to stick around and do them. You can't just go, "Point of order," and then skedaddle, right? I would think so.

We need notification of more than just workers' rights under this bill. I remember a now no longer member of the Legislature, a Minister of Labour, who promised me in this chamber that he would post notices of workers' rights to refuse unsafe work, to post them in clear, plain language, to ensure they were in as many languages as need be and that they were in a prominent place and in large letters. Promise kept? Not even in spirit, because it simply never happened.

As we reach the end—I've got only 15 minutes left to go—I'd be interested in seeing if the Minister of Labour is inclined to use two minutes of the time after that to commit himself to this bill going to committee. It seems to me the government should have a strong interest in this bill getting thorough consideration in committee. If the government is serious about the notice provisions, it seems to me they would be inclined and interested in having the public scrutinize those notice provisions.

If the government is serious about not reinforcing a 13-hour workday—because this is what the bill does; in the year 2004, we've got a government in the province of Ontario that says workers are still working 13 hours a day—it seems to me the government should be prepared to put this bill to committee and public scrutiny, if it is really serious about not in effect creating workweeks that are in excess of 60 hours, never mind eliminating 60 hours—in excess of 60 hours—because the government talks a big game about needing approval for a 60-hour workweek. Make it clear: The bill does not eliminate 60-hour workweeks, not by any stretch of the imagination. No matter how you look at it—upside down and right side up, inside out, from front to back, back to front—the bill doesn't eliminate 60-hour workweeks. End of story.

It doesn't even require certificates or approval from the ministry for 60-hour workweeks because it is sufficient that the employer make application and that there be this so-called agreement, this accord.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Sixty-hour workweeks. Read the bill. The bill doesn't eliminate 60-hour workweeks, nor does it require approvals for 60-hour workweeks.

If it really has that purpose as its intent, then it seems to me the bill should go out to committee, to public scrutiny. I'm not talking about the kind of committee process that is a mockery that has been imposed by this government with its time allocation of Bill 83. I'm not talking about that anti-democratic guillotining of debate, either in the House or in committee.

Obviously the House is going to recess at some point for summer; whether it's well into July or not remains to be seen. I'm going to be around, and I'm more than eager to sit on committee, listen to submissions and review amendments.

My concern is that this government's commitment to committee, if there is any, consists of the same level of commitment there is for Bill 83 in this incredibly undemocratic time allocation motion, a little tactic it borrowed from the nastiest of the Tories, a tactic the Liberals abhorred when it was utilized by the Tories. They squealed, they squawked, the Liberals did. They jumped up and down. They hollered. There were clenched fists. There was carrying on. There was bell-ringing. There was thumping of tables. There was all sorts of unparliamentary language being hurled across this centre corridor here at the Conservatives by the Liberals when the Conservatives used time allocation over and over again.

Well, be it the Stockholm syndrome, the Patty Hearst syndrome or something akin to it, here we see the Liberals adopting the most heinous, the most jackbootish of tactics utilized by the Tories: a time allocation motion on something as fundamental as a budget bill that is the most controversial budget—the Magna budget, contemptuous as it was, was not as ill-received as this McGuinty-Sorbara budget. The contemptuous budget at Magna was better received than your Sorbara-McGuinty budget here in the House.

It's one thing to terminate debate, for instance, on second reading. It's another to then send it to a committee that is a sham, a committee process that would make Stalin look like a piker, a committee process that is outright Soviet in its style. For people who talked about change and who dared—oh, we don't hear it too often any more—talk about democratic renewal, there's nothing democratic about shutting the public out. You can shut down debate in the Legislature, but shut the public out from those kinds of public hearing processes and you are taking on a far different beast than the opposition caucuses here at Queen's Park.

Maybe you've given up. Maybe Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals have just given up on the people of Ontario. At 9%, basically you're talking about your family members, right? At 9% you're talking about your family members and your in-laws. Maybe the government has just said, "No, forget the people of Ontario because we've already burned them big time, and boy, we have got them ticked off at us." So the government says,

"We'll just steamroller on through." Quite frankly, it can't get any worse. The problem is, it's not going to get any better.

2120

We see this sort of disdain for democracy. We see this disdain for Parliament. We see this disdain for the opposition. We see government backbenchers who have been eviscerated and eunuched such that they don't have the wherewithal any more to perform their role of a check and balance on their executive—on their cabinet and on their Premier. You've got backbenchers who have been bought off with membership on so-called committees, who undoubtedly have been told, more than a few of them, that as long as they stay in line and continue to vote the right way, as long as they don't follow the lead of Sue Whalen out Windsor-Essex way—you see, the interesting thing is that Ms Whalen has more experience in her little baby finger than most of the Liberal backbenchers do in terms of their whole political careers. I would ask these folks here to note that you've got Ms Whalen—she was born into politics; she lives, eats, breathes and sleeps it—saying: "I've never made the kind of promise that Dalton McGuinty did.... He owes the people of Ontario an apology for what he did."

Well, we know what she's talking about. Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals promised anything they had to, promised everything they could, to win an election and then proceeded to break those promises systematically, thoroughly, rigorously, in a very rigid and disciplined way. The question isn't what promises are left to be broken; it's a matter of when they will be.

You've got the now notorious Lorrie Goldstein list of 231. I understand that you can buy from the Toronto Sun a mural, a chart, a billboard of the 231 Lorrie Goldstein column promises, and you can, like a prisoner in the pen, like Conrad Black, if they ever send him away, marking off the days of his sentence—

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: —or John Roth. But Tubby Black gets special mention. And now that you've brought up Tubby Black, I've got to tell you, it appears very much that Babs Amiel is in there as thick as thieves with him.

The Minister of Labour agrees with my characterization of Tubby Black as nothing more than a common thief. So the Minister of Labour and I do agree on something. It's fascinating: We thought we were worlds apart because we disagree about the real impact of your bill, but here the Minister of Labour, Mr Bentley, and I both agree that Tubby Black should go to jail and that Babs Amiel should perhaps do her term in the women's prison as well.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Well, for what they've stolen from Hollinger and what they have stolen from Hollinger's shareholders. That's the sort of stuff that's giving capitalism a bad name, as if there wasn't a history already to give it a bad enough name.

I'm pleased to see that the Minister of Labour and I have some common ground. Maybe we can use that. Maybe that's a starting point. Maybe I can convince the Minister of Labour to eliminate not just the 60-hour workweek but the 48-hour workweek as well.

One of the solutions is to sync the maximum hours of work with the point at which overtime kicks in. When you have a disconnect of maximum—really, we've never had a 40-hour workweek in this province. My father was a steelworker down in Welland, and I was old enough as a kid in the 1950s to remember the fight and the successful victory for a five-day workweek. I remember full well Saturday being a regular workday for steelworkers and for a whole lot of other workers as well, and the fight, the struggle, for a five-day workweek, and all the hand-wringing and all the weeping and wailing once again: "Oh, we're going to go to hell in a handbasket. People are going to get slothful and lazy and the economy will falter and collapse if those workers don't keep their noses to the grindstone and continue to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and do those six-day workweeks." Well, the five-day workweek of course didn't bring the economy to a standstill. In fact, it created more prosperity.

One of the observations you've got to make, as has been mentioned, whether it was Popular Science you were referring to or even Life magazine, is that we should be building a society wherein all people who want to work have access to a job, rather than maintaining artificially high levels of unemployment to meet bizarre and Byzantine fiscal policies. We should be struggling to build a society where workers earn sufficient wages so they aren't compelled by way of economic coercion to work in excess of 40 hours a week. We should be looking at ways of reducing the workweek. We should really be looking at the prospect and the impact of, oh, a 32-hour workweek and what that would mean in terms of ensuring that every worker had a role in the working economy. We should be encouraging workers to continue to struggle for a high-wage economy so they've got the resources to enable them to engage in leisure activities and make investments in those things, even as industries, as economic activators in themselves.

Aw, nuts. I find myself with but a minute and 36 seconds, Speaker. I find myself frustrated because I didn't canvass those things I wanted to, and I fear I have not presented my case as thoroughly as I could have, had I had more time. I've got to ask the people who interrupted me and used some of my hour to accept some of that responsibility. They not only consumed some of my time, but they also distracted me. I found myself having to roll back the tape and start up again at a point where I had put a marker on the videotape or on the audiotape.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): On a point of order, Speaker: I've just been reviewing standing order 23(i), which says, "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." I distinctly heard the member from Niagara Centre say about the Minister of Labour, a man of respect, that somehow he had some feeling with regard to Lord Black being in jail. I think that imputes a false motive, and I think it would be irresponsible for this House to allow a falsehood like that to stand tonight. The

Minister of Labour is a man of great respect, Mr Speaker, and I think we should have some type of ruling from you on that matter. If you don't, really, where is parliamentary tradition in this House if we don't do that? Again, I just want to let you know that it's section 23(i).

The Acting Speaker: I don't find that there is a point of order. I'll give the member from Niagara Centre a few seconds to conclude his remarks.

Mr Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. I want to congratulate the member for finally getting to standing order 23. It has been seven months and he has finally gotten to page 14. There's going to be enough time, I suspect, before the next election for him to read sufficient standing orders to have a complete and thorough understanding of them.

To the Minister of Labour: Perhaps that was an error. Perhaps he doesn't think thieves should go to jail—thieves like Conrad Black. I concede that to him.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. It being quite close to 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 am.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 10 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 10 juin 2004

The House met at 1000.
Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS PRICE FREEZE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE GEL DU PRIX DE CERTAINS PRODUITS PÉTROLIERS

Mr Tascona moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 48, An Act to provide for an interim freeze in the price of certain petroleum products / Projet de loi 48, Loi prévoyant le gel provisoire du prix de certains produits pétroliers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr Tascona, you have 10 minutes to lead off.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Bill 48, the gas price freeze act, was introduced by myself on April 5 of this year in a move to stop consumer gouging at the pump and, more importantly, to bring stability to the gas marketplace in terms of pricing.

Since then, in the period of time of April, May and June, we have seen wild swings in the price of gasoline, swings sometimes of 20 cents per litre in the price of gasoline, which is just not supportable with respect to how the marketplace is actually working and in my view is strictly designed to take advantage of people who rely on it, and in particular, in my riding, where there is heavy, heavy commuter traffic to get to work; in other words, to take advantage of them in terms of the price of gasoline. After all, that is something they rely on day to day. What we are seeing, as opposed to last year when the price of gasoline at the pump was 62 cents per litre, is at times almost a 50% increase in the price of gasoline, which is detrimentally affecting not only the economy but also the pocketbooks of people who rely on gasoline to get back and forth to work.

So what this bill does is deal with price stability for 90 days, for April, May and June, and also an additional 60 days, which would takes us through this summer, to bring stability into the marketplace.

The province has the power to set the price, as they do already in Prince Edward Island. In fact, what the Liberal government is in effect doing for the price of energy is that they set the price with respect to what we pay for electricity. They can also do that with gasoline. Why they're not doing it, I really don't know.

As you are well aware, Bill 48 puts an interim freeze on the price of gas at the pump at the dollar amount of the product as of March 31, 2004. The act comes into force 10 days after it is passed by the Ontario Legislature and lasts for 90 days, with an option to be extended for an additional 60 days by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

I recognize that the federal government is responsible for the gasoline marketplace under the federal Competition Act, but they continue to do nothing to stop consumer gouging. One of the main reasons is that they have not put in place realistic measures with respect to ensuring fairness in the marketplace by holding companies to a civil standard of proof as opposed to a criminal standard of proof. We are dealing with competitive activity in the commercial marketplace and the civil standard of proof is what should be put. We tried to get them to change that back when we were on the gas price task force in 1999, but the federal government has done nothing, notwithstanding that they had their own task force that recommended a civil standard of proof, and also the elimination of the GST on the price at the pump.

It is clear that consumers have had enough. I believe a freeze on the price of gasoline will bring a much-needed break and stability to the scene. I have always said that the solution to high and volatile gas prices lies in a more stable and competitive marketplace. The federal government needs to step up to the plate and manage this issue. A good start would be to fix the Competition Act so that the tools and powers are there to protect consumers and ensure the market operates in a fair and transparent manner, while at the same time making the industry responsible for defending its own pricing strategies and business practices.

After all, there are three main companies that control the gasoline marketplace. They also refine the gasoline and they sell it. They have controls at all levels of the marketplace. Quite frankly, that's something the government should be looking at with respect to what kind of profits they're making at each level. They'll say they're making nothing at the retail level, but rest assured, from what I understand, they're making a very handsome profit at the refinery level, to the tune of about 26%. That's something that is not fair.

I know the Speaker shares with me the concern about the marketplace, because he's put forth bills himself with

respect to notice in terms of changing the pricing, which would also leave the marketplace a little bit fairer with respect to changes in the price. Due to the lack of action on this issue by the federal government, I introduced this bill. If they won't do anything to stop the price-gouging monopoly, then the province needs to step in and provide the necessary protection for the people of Ontario.

Former Ontario Premier Bill Davis got it. He was the Ontario Premier who said he would not stand by and let the people of Ontario be taken advantage of as a result of high gas prices. He froze them. In 1974, after OPEC cut oil production and gas prices went through the roof, Bill Davis froze them. If Davis could do it then, we can too. That is what's needed right now.

I also want to mention a recent survey that was taken. I refer to an article in last Sunday's Toronto Sun. On June 6, the Toronto Sun reported the results of a poll. The poll asked Ontarians what they thought was the biggest rip-off. Guess what they identified? Across Ontario, 38% of the people stated that gas prices were the number one rip-off.

Anyone who knows my record on this issue is well aware that I have been pushing for lower gas prices since I took office. When I first addressed the issue of high gas prices to the current Liberal government, the response I got was laughable. The Minister of Energy, the Honourable Dwight Duncan, said, on May 13, "There is a world problem right now and for Ontario to act unilaterally to put a freeze on anything could do potential harm to the economy." To the minister I say, high gas price are hurting Ontario taxpayers, the same taxpayers who were recently hit with huge tax increases in the budget.

1010

The minister also said that he can't see how either freezing gas prices or having gas stations post potential increases a few days in advance will do anything to help the gouged consumer. I respectfully disagree. If he feels it is within his power to control pricing in the hydro-electric industry, why wouldn't he do it with respect to gasoline prices? To him I say, then what will?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Stephen Harper wouldn't like this.

Mr Tascona: The Minister of Tourism is going to be facing a tourism industry under pressure. I can tell right now that there are a lot fewer cars coming up through Barrie because of the price of gasoline.

If you are so concerned and are watching the issue so carefully, what is your plan? What does the government plan to do about this? I hope the answer is not the same as that of his federal cousins in Ottawa. As we all know, what they have done or plan to do is absolutely nothing. I have a plan and it works. We know it works because it has been done before.

This is a serious issue facing the economy of Ontario and it's a serious issue facing the pocketbooks of many Ontarians. We've been having a petition put across the province with respect to this issue in terms of encouraging the government to pass Bill 48 and make sure it comes forth in a timely manner. This is second reading. Also, we're putting in it that the federal government remove the GST, which is an illegal tax, a tax on a tax. The federal government has known from their own task force back in 1998 that the GST should be removed.

To make it clear in terms of where we stand on taxes, certainly the province's is a flat tax, 14.7 cents per litre. The federal tax is 10 cents per litre plus the GST. So when we were paying 62 cents for gasoline, the tax structure was still in place. The only variable tax was the GST put on by the federal government. Now at certain places you're paying up to 95 cents a litre, depending on where you are in the province, and the taxes are the same. What you're going to see, I imagine, once we get through this quarter, are unbelievable profits by the Big Three oil companies. They won't be made at the retail level; they will be made at the refinery level.

What I am asking for is a simple solution: price stability—it's within the jurisdiction of the province—until the marketplace sets itself in a way that the price of crude and the price in terms of what is happening at the refinery level are stable. It is unstable when you're seeing price fluctuations of almost 20 cents per litre back and forth. The price is going up 10 cents per litre and then decreasing. We have to have price stability. Otherwise, the economy is not going to function properly.

What's going to happen, with the Liberal budget that is taking, in general, between $1,400 and $2,000 out of the taxpayers' pockets, along with these hydro increases, along with car insurance increases and along with the price of gas is that we're headed toward an economy that's going right down the tubes.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I certainly understand the frustration people are going through with regard to the price of gas when they go to the pump and see the price going up and down. I think there is a great deal of, if you want, both scepticism as well as trying to—there is no clear understanding in the general public as to why these gas prices are going up the way they are, and they differ from gas station to gas station.

The member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford is bringing forward a bill. It's perplexing to me because I know he co-chaired a task force with Mr O'Toole, I believe, and they reported to the minister at that time, who was the Honourable Mr Runciman, Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relation, on June 29, 2000.

That task force, by the way, apparently provided to the minister at the time—the previous government also appointed a task force in 1998. I guess my question to the member is, if he feels that this is doable, that it's something the provincial government can do, why, then, did they not act to freeze the prices at that time? I don't understand why now, when he is in opposition. This is certainly good political fodder, but the reality is that the agreements we have under NAFTA and others do not give Ontario that flexibility to freeze the rates.

Now, I certainly understand that there should be discussion with our Minister of Energy and our petroleum industry in Ontario, and I believe that the minister has spoken with them and will be meeting with them in

regard to this issue, because we don't want to see our consumers at the pumps feeling that they're being gouged with these prices.

But let's look at the reality of this. I know that Mr Tascona has said that Premier Davis could do it, but he froze gasoline prices for 90 days in 1974 when OPEC cut production at that time. The irony in this place sometimes is that we can talk and compare things without anybody looking at the evidence and at the facts so that when we have an argument to this, there is actual substantive fact underlying what we're presenting. It kind of troubles me.

There's a huge difference. I know the member stated that, for instance, if we can somehow control the price of electricity—well, there's a tremendous difference. He's comparing apples and oranges here. I want to go back to when Premier Davis froze gasoline prices. He's trying to copy what Davis did. However, it was a different time, and in 1974, gasoline prices were regulated by the federal government, there was no NAFTA, and the 90-day delay reflected the timing for crude from Alberta to show up at gasoline pumps in Ontario. Under NAFTA, favouring domestic suppliers is not allowed. He knows that, and he understands that.

Again, I believe that the government certainly has a responsibility to meet and to discuss with the petroleum industry why these prices are going up and see what we can do for consumers; but to try to pretend that freezing prices at March 31 rates is a way to attain stability in Ontario is disingenuous, because the member understands full well that that's unrealistic and that the jurisdiction is not there for us to be able to do that. Nonetheless, I do believe that consumers need to have some protection in the fluctuation of prices from, as I said, increases of prices that seem to be sometimes not understood by the consumer.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of the bill before us, Bill 48, An Act to provide for an interim freeze—I think it's important to recognize that it is an interim freeze—in the price of certain petroleum products. I commend the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford for introducing this bill. From all the information I've had, the member has been actively and very strenuously working on this issue for some time, from the time that he was appointed as a member of what was commonly known as the gas-buster committee. He has been actively involved in this situation and worked very hard on it.

I do believe that, as the member across the way and the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford pointed out, this really is a difficult situation to step in and freeze the price of petroleum products when generally the situation revolves around the federal government and their rights and responsibilities.

I do want to take exception, though, with the comment that it can't be done under NAFTA. Under NAFTA, you can't give preferential treatment for domestic suppliers. I don't see anything in the bill that deals with domestic suppliers. The results of this bill would in fact treat imported products exactly the same way that it treats our own domestic products. So I think it may be a little far-fetched to have that comment.

1020

I think it's important to recognize that this problem isn't just new today, but it has been ongoing for some time. I was looking through some of my correspondence this morning, and I have a letter here—I just wanted to refer to it—from one of my constituents. It says, "I wrote your office in 1999 and 2000 concerning exorbitant gas prices that needed regulation, due to lack of competition and/or price-fixing that existed at that time, continued to exist in 2003"—he included some clippings with that—"and continues to exist today on a larger scale than ever...."

The gas price in Ingersoll the day that he wrote this letter—this letter was written May 16—was 90 cents a litre. In Nova Scotia, it was in the mid-90s. In British Columbia, it was $1.02.

"The need for regulation was never greater, as obviously absolutely nothing has been done to curb these exorbitant prices five years later, federally or provincially. When, if ever, can we expect some action to control these completely unjustified prices?"

He has a PS on the bottom that I found rather interesting. I guess this is kind of a note to me: "Please don't refer to high crude prices. According to scale"—$1 on the crude price is less than one penny a litre for the gasoline.

Just very quickly, I wanted to touch on when we talk about the price per litre at the pumps. I do a lot of travelling, as you do, Mr Speaker, up and down the 401 to come here to Queen's Park. I stop to fill my car up at least every other day when I'm travelling back and forth. It takes two trips per tankful. On the pumps, we have a little sticker. Now, I wouldn't want to suggest that it's misleading advertising, but if you read the sticker, it points out the amount of the per litre price that is crude, the amount that is tax, how much is for refining and so forth. The amount is in a percentage for each one.

Now, when these stickers were put on, if you read the very small lettering, it says that this was based on 2002 pricing. If you read that, then the percentage of crude or the percentage of the refining cost is very low. But, as the member mentioned in his introduction, the taxes are fixed. So the 13 cents provincial tax, the 11 cents federal excise tax and the GST—incidentally, the GST is the only one that does fluctuate—are an ever-decreasing percentage of the price of gas at the pumps.

Again, that goes to the PS on my letter here from my constituent, who says that isn't the total answer. There is more to it than the oil companies are telling us, as far as setting the price and it ever going up. It is, I suppose, based on consumer demand in an open marketplace, the problem being that there are so few refiners and so few actual distributors that they can really set the price wherever they want. They know that, as I'm going down the 401, I have no choice but to stop and buy the gas. When I was in the livestock feed business, competition meant that I had to keep the price in line or they would

just purchase from someone else. There was no set price that everybody was charging, and that's really what's happening here.

I just want to quickly go over what was related earlier by the member from Sarnia-Lambton, that there's really nothing that the provincial government can do. Well, I think this bill this morning points out that something can be done on behalf of the provincial government, and passing this bill would do that.

I have here some quotes. Also, I should mention that I've been in this House for a number of months and years, I suppose, and when the Liberal Party was in opposition, I heard some of the members saying that they had the answer to this. I have to assume, from when they had the answer, all the government of that day had to do was implement their answer. I believe it was Mr Bartolucci, the member for Sudbury, who said, "All we had to do was implement their answer." I can only assume, since all this Legislature really has the power to do is pass legislation, that there was something—when he said they had the answer, that they were proposing to legislate at least a temporary price freeze or some way of controlling the price from going up.

I think it is somewhat, I wouldn't say dishonest, but different, that they would suggest at one point that they had the answer and now say there is absolutely no answer available on behalf the provincial government. I think there's a conflicting story in those two.

The Minister of Energy said, I read from the paper of May 13, "'I'm deeply concerned about the price of gas, far beyond what its impact is on automobile users,' Duncan said." It would seem to me that, if that's the case, we should be looking at every opportunity we have to bring those gas prices in line.

"Dwight distanced his government from a responsibility to combat the inflated costs, however.

"'We don't regulate gasoline prices,' he said. 'There's a world problem right now and for Ontario to act unilaterally to put a freeze on anything could do potential harm to the economy.'"

The exorbitant gas prices are, in my opinion, doing more harm to the economy than any temporary freeze on the prices would do.

I was also looking through some of my information, and I remembered a question that was asked by the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford a number of weeks ago in the Legislature. It was to the Premier. It was referred to the Minister of Tourism for an answer. The minister said that he was "monitoring this matter carefully" and is "prepared to take whatever action he deems appropriate at the appropriate time." I see the Minister of Tourism coming in now, and that being his quote, I'm sure he will agree that that's exactly what he said. I would think this might be the appropriate time, as he refers to "the appropriate time," to do something. I think at that time we were talking about 70-cent, 75-cent gasoline. Now when we are seeing people on the front page of the newspaper changing the signs so they're capable of putting three figures instead of two for a litre of gasoline—that means the price is going to go over a dollar—I think this might be the appropriate time.

To finish off, I don't want to take all the time; we have some other members who would like to speak to it. The supplementary to that question to the Premier is, "Will you stand up today and make a commitment to all the suffering businesses and taxpayers who are being gouged at the pump as a result of the outrageous price of gas, pass my Bill 48...." Again, this was a question from the member who introduced this bill. I would just hope that after debate this morning, when it's time to vote for it, the Premier will be in the House to support this bill to deal with the outrageous gas prices that are at the pumps today and help our economy and help our average citizen going to work with the uncontrollable cost that they have absolutely no ability to deal with. They cannot get to work without gas and they cannot go places without gas.

I think this is a small first step in dealing with the matter and I commend the member for bringing this bill forward.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is indeed an honour—

Hon Mr Bradley: Always an intriguing tie.

Mr Prue: Yes, it is an intriguing tie. Do you like the tie today?

It is indeed an honour to stand to speak to this bill today. I have to tell you at the outset that we will be supporting Bill 48, introduced by the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

1030

I let my turn go around the first time before actually standing up to speak, because I wanted to hear what a Liberal member might say. It was quite instructive to listen to the member from Sarnia-Lambton as to exactly what the position is that she is taking. I would perhaps glean from that what the position might be of other members of the Liberal caucus on where they are going with this particular bill.

This is a bill whose time surely, at this stage, has come. The purport of the bill is to freeze the price of gasoline as it existed on March 31, 2004. That is before the price of crude oil began to rise—but not so much before the price of crude rose, it's before the gasoline companies starting to reap, I would think, excessive profits, raising the price of gasoline in this province beyond 90 cents for some weeks, although it has since declined somewhat. The purport of this bill will do one thing: lower the average price of a litre of gasoline from this week's current average of 81.4 cents a litre to 68.6 cents a litre, a reduction of some 15.7% of the cost of gasoline.

At the outset, I have to state that we are not, in our party at least, blaming the operators, those who own the gas stations in the city, who own or operate the gas stations in this province. You have to clearly delineate the little guy who is out there pumping gas, making about a cent a litre for all of his labours—for paying taxes, for working in the community, for doing what he or she needs to do to earn a living—from the big oil companies.

It is said worldwide; they are called the Five Sisters. Those Five Sisters make enormous profits, not only in Ontario, not only in Canada, but literally around the world.

The price of crude oil, although it has started to go up and there are many factors for making it go up, is only around $40 a barrel. If you do the mathematics—and I invite all of the members to do the mathematics—of how many litres are in a barrel, there are over 200 litres of crude in a barrel of oil. For a minute, stop and think about that. That's about 20 cents a litre. There are refining, processing and transportation costs, there are all of those things, but west Brent goes for around 20 cents a litre. That's what the big oil companies pay for it on the spot market.

The big oil companies also have a supply in this country that lasts a long time. The oil that you pump into your gas tank today arrived in Canada—if it came from outside of Canada or came from Alberta—90 to 120 days ago. It has been in the system for a long time. Yet, if you watch—and we all watch—as the price of a litre of gasoline goes up every day, when the spot market says, "The crude oil price is going up a nickel or a dime today or a dollar a barrel today," you can literally see that the price of the litre of gasoline being sold at the neighbourhood garage is going up at the same time. That is totally unfounded and unfair because the gasoline being pumped was paid for, shipped, processed and was sitting in a vault, reserve or a tank somewhere for 120 days. They know how to raise the prices and they know how to use the arguments of the spot market, but they are not beholden to that spot market for at least 90 to 120 days.

That's why I like this bill: because the bill will freeze the price for 90 days. If there is a good argument to be made on the spot market and if there is a good argument for the oil companies to make that the price of a barrel of oil, be it Brent, west Texas, North Sea or Alberta, has gone up a significant amount in the previous 90 days, then that's a fair comment. If it has gone from 20 cents to 21 cents a litre, or 22 cents a litre, maybe gasoline will have to go up a penny or two, or whatever it goes up, but the wild fluctuation every day is certainly nothing more than price gouging. The commuters know it, those who run automobiles know it, and even those who take public transit know it, because the public transit authorities, like the TTC, have to pay those prices too, unless, like the TTC, they're very smart and buy their gas in bulk at the year's beginning; the prices actually didn't affect them very much this year.

I was surprised—or I shouldn't have been surprised, I guess—to listen to the member from Sarnia-Lambton when she lambasted the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford for not being successful in his previous government in putting his issue forward and having former Premiers Harris and Eves follow him in the direction he wanted to go. That is correct: He was not able to get them to follow the direction he wants to go. But he should be commended, because he has never deviated from the direction he thinks this province should go. If it takes him one or two or five times to pass a bill like this, I am sure he will continue in his efforts.

I am asking the Liberals to follow him. I am asking you not to castigate him or say he was wrong or anything else about what happened before in a previous government. I am asking you to do what you have always said you would do if you were in government. You know, it's been very nice these last couple of weeks; we finally have a researcher, and I have some quotes of what some of you gentlemen have said in the past. I would like to read some of them out because I think they're quite instructive.

I'd like to start out with one that happened recently. Norm Miller, the member from Muskoka, asked Mr Bartolucci, who is now the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, a question on May 10 of this year about the bill. Mr Bartolucci replied, "It's incumbent that the petroleum products industry understand the significant impact that gas prices have on the people of northern Ontario." He then said he'd been meeting with executives from the industry and that this was "the first time" blah, blah, blah, "that they met with a northern minister."

He went on, though, to add that he would "never apologize for" what he did in opposition. He said that in light of the Conservative government, "We in the opposition had to be very creative and articulate the concerns of northerners." He concluded by stating, "We will not be raising false expectations or hopes."

This is from the same minister who introduced bills himself, but now, because he's on that side, he seems to be taking a diametrically opposite position than he did when he was on this side of the House. I have to tell you, he's not alone.

Interjection.

Mr Prue: No, he's done other things. I mean, here it is, Mr Bartolucci, April 12, 2000. He stood in this House, again on this side of House, with a petition. It was a wonderful petition because he, at the end, signed and said he was in agreement. It called upon the government to pass "Bill 16, the Gasoline Pricing Act, introduced by ... Jim Bradley;"—who is now a minister and who's right over here—"Bill 18, the Gas Price Watchdog Act, introduced by ... Mike Colle;"—who is sitting over there today and who is now the PA to the finance minister—"and Bill 52, the Petroleum Products Price Freeze Act, introduced by ... Rick Bartolucci."

The whereases in that petition he presented had the sentence, "Furthermore, we the consumers want Mike Harris to know that we want to be able to go to the pumps and fill our tanks without emptying our pockets."

On May 17 in Hansard, Mike Colle, who's sitting here today, noted that in 1975, Bill Davis had stepped in to protect consumers by freezing prices for 90 days. He urged the then Premier to "stop the bellyaching and take concrete action, because frankly people don't want to hear any more complaints. They want you to do your job. Prices are at 75 and 78 cents a litre.... Stop whining and do something."

On November 23, 1999, Mike Colle, again in Hansard, asked the Minister of Consumer and Commercial

Relations, "Why don't you protect consumers? Why are you so afraid and unwilling to take on the big oil companies? Why don't you use your power to freeze and roll back gas prices just like Bill Davis did in 1975? When are you going to stand up for the consumer and bring these oil companies to account just like Bill Davis did in 1975?"

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): And what was the response?

Mr Prue: Well, I'm going to get to that.

On November 22, 1999, Mr Bartolucci tabled a petition he had signed asking government "to introduce predatory gas pricing legislation in order to control the amount of money we, the consumers, are forced to pay at the gas pumps."

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Mr Speaker, I don't want to leave you out either. In the Legislature in December 1998, Bruce Crozier, now the Speaker, and a very capable one, said, "Pricing is under the control of the province. If the government were really serious about the peril of the independent dealer in the province of Ontario, they would be looking at predatory pricing, because that is in their jurisdiction."

Last but not least, I'd like to go back to Mr Bartolucci. He seems to be a favourite in all of this. On September 3, 1997, Mr Bartolucci told the Legislature, "Our constituents, from any riding in Ontario, are tired of people passing the buck. They're tired of the provincial government putting the onus on the federal government. They're tired of the government saying it was the Liberals' fault or the New Democratic Party's fault.... Then I wrote to and discussed with the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations the idea that a commission should be set up, a commission to investigate when prices rise to see if it's acceptable and justifiable, so the consumer in Ontario would be protected. Again, nothing has happened with regard to that recommendation."

The opportunity presents itself again today. We have a bill that has been put forward by Mr Tascona, the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, a bill that will do exactly what at least four members of the government party, when in opposition, were asking to happen. It is a bill whose time has come again. It comes in cycles, but the time is very relevant today.

We can see in this province what is happening in terms of the trucking industry. We can see what is happening in terms of our industrial capacity, with the cost of manufactured goods being transported back and forth. We can see what is happening to tourism, with the number of tourists coming from the United States in decline and the number of our own internal tourists from Canada or from Ontario seeming very much to be in decline. We are seeing our restaurants and our tourist areas being hurt. We are seeing consumers every day being forced to pay increasing amounts of money merely to go back and forth to work. They are looking for answers.

Last October, we went through a general election. There were at least 231 promises that came forward from the governing party. They promised to do many things: They promised not to raise taxes, they promised to make things better, they promised to increase the staff in our hospitals and they promised to do things in the schools. But they promised to listen to what the people wanted and that they would do consultations in a way that had not been done in many years. I invite the members opposite to go out there and ask your constituents what they think about this. We already know what they think about your hospital tax and we already know what they think about your ability to lead, but go out and ask them what they think about this price freeze.

I will tell you, if you pass this bill, if you support this bill, if you do something to regulate the high cost of gasoline and price-gouging in Ontario, you will redeem yourselves with some of those very people who have turned their backs on you in the last number of weeks and who have turned their backs on your Liberal cousins seeking election to Ottawa. This is an opportunity for you to do something right, to do something correct. This is an opportunity for you to actually help in keeping one of the promises you made last October.

I commend the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford and I would ask that members opposite support his bill as well.

Hon Mr Bradley: It's always interesting, if you go back in Hansard, to read the speeches of people who sit on the opposition side and the government side. It seems only the names change; the arguments are the same.

I commend my friend Joe Tascona, as an opposition member, for bringing forward this bill. There's a bit of mischief in it, but I think he genuinely feels annoyed and angered, as we all do, by the high price of gas. I'm not one to say this is strictly politically motivated, but this is a political House and I understand that.

There are many quotes that could be made about what has happened years back. We have to say this, Joe: You were a member of the task force, the gas-busters or whatever it was called, that the last government set up to give the appearance of doing something about high gas prices. There were 14 recommendations that came out, and one of the 14 was implemented by the previous government, of which my friend Joe Tascona was a member.

When I asked questions of the previous government, they talked about the virtues of the free market system. I know this Conservative Party, with the exception of a few moderates in it, are very, very committed to the absolute free market determining all prices.

So I understand that when people are in opposition, they are able to bring forward this kind of legislation. In government, they get new information provided to them. I once said, Joe, that for the last 25 years Ministers of Energy have had the same briefing note about gas prices in the book when they get up to answer, because I have heard those answers.

But I'm as annoyed as I think most members are at what I consider to be—and you always get in trouble when you say this—the collusion that we see at the gas

pump. Nobody can tell me, when everybody puts up the price at the same time and it is just about the same—it goes up to 79.9 cents or something like that—that somehow there's not collusion. I don't know if you can call it price-fixing, but it's collusion. The other thing members have mentioned—and my friend Bruce Crozier on a number of occasions has talked about this annoyance—is the price jumping huge amounts almost overnight.

I think if you examine it carefully, you'll see that in these times of very high gas prices, the people who make the most money are the oil companies. You're right, Joe. You will see the next profit, and it will be listed as a huge profit by the oil companies in their next reporting. To say it's simply reflecting the price of crude oil—I find that not believable. Maybe I'm being unfair, but I don't think so. If you ask anybody out there, "Is it a problem?" it is a problem.

I look around the country and say, "So what are other parties, other governments, doing?" I thought, because I heard my good friend from Beaches-East York talk about the NDP, the prices must be lower in Manitoba. Indeed, they're not lower in Manitoba, with an NDP government. Then I said. "Well, OK, that's an aberration. Saskatchewan, surely." I looked in Saskatchewan and they are higher than they are in Ontario, and they're right next door to the oil patch.

I remember that when the NDP was in power—I hate to go back to these things—they raised gasoline taxes by 13%. I have some quotes here from Jenny Carter, a former energy minister, and Brian Charlton, both saying, in essence, "There's nothing we can really do about it." And I could say that of my many Conservative friends, but that's not what we're talking about today.

One thing I'm glad the member did mention is that it's not taxes that are the problem. The right wing also says that. I did hear Stephen Harper say, "If only you drop the taxes, all will be solved." Is there anybody in this House who thinks that if you drop the tax by five cents, the oil companies wouldn't simply put the price of gas up five cents? Of course they would. So that isn't the solution. The solution from the oil patch in Alberta, from Stephen Harper and Ralph Klein and so on, of simply dropping the tax, is not the solution. It's the companies putting the price up. I know where the strongest support comes from for my friend Stephen Harper and my friend Ralph Klein; it comes from that oil patch. In fact, they were dictating Conservative policy on environment. Just yesterday I heard him say, "We're going to abandon the Kyoto accord because I know how popular the Kyoto accord is in the oil patch of Alberta."

When this was done before, it seems to me we didn't have NAFTA at the time. I remember Brian Mulroney, that great Conservative Prime Minister, said, "NAFTA is absolutely necessary." He went to Washington and sang an Irish song with the late President of the United States, to whom people in the US are paying tribute at the present time, President Reagan. They put together the NAFTA agreement. The NAFTA agreement doesn't allow a two-price system. This is why, back when Bill Davis did it originally, you could do it.

There are a lot of people in the east who liked the national energy policy. It wasn't popular in Alberta. I understand that.

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Mr Tascona: PEI.

Hon Mr Bradley: The member mentions that PEI, which I think is about the size of the city of St Catharines, has some control. But when you examine what the prices are in those provinces, I wish they were substantially lower. When you examine them, they really aren't lower if there is a huge demand taking place.

What I like about the member bringing this forward is that it focuses some attention on the gas companies. That's what I like about it. That's not his only purpose. He wants to focus some attention on the government and say, "What are you going to do about it?" I understand that.

I met with the people from the United States and they said, "What is this doing with tourism? We're really hit with gas prices." They were talking about the United States, even though theirs are somewhat lower than ours. So all over the world we are faced with this situation.

I actually think that the more we can rail at the oil companies about this, the more focus of attention we put on them, the better. From that point of view, I want to commend the member for bringing forward this legislation at this time. I want to suggest to him that he speak to Stephen Harper and explain to him that it is the oil companies—his friends in Alberta that support the Conservative Party so strongly provincially and federally—that are the problem, not the gas tax. I want to commend my friend from Barrie for saying that. He understands that and is deserving of the greatest of praise for that.

This is an interesting piece of legislation, as I say. In opposition, everybody loves this. In government, they are a little bit afraid of it. They do remember that the federal Progressive Conservatives deregulated oil prices in Canada in 1985. It's unfortunate that that happened at that time, back in 1985. I think a lot of us would like to have seen that rolled back, but again, that's all to do with the NAFTA agreement and the inability to implement some of these tools, such as Premier Davis brought forward, because of that NAFTA agreement.

Good for you, Joe, for focusing attention on this issue. I'm sorry that as a member of the gas busters you were unable to bring the prices down when you were in office. It was all a big show. They stood out there in front of various places. I remember the pictures—always in the Toronto Sun, of course—of the gas busters, and the price of gas went up or went down according to what the market was going to do at the time.

The worst things that happens is when you bring forward this resolution and the gas prices are going down at the time, because you always want to bring forward a resolution or a bill at a time when the prices are heading way up. I don't think they are going to go down substantially over the next while.

I think it would have been good if Premier Harris and Premier Eves had brought the oil barons into their office

and laid the law down with them. The only time that Mike Harris and Ernie Eves seemed to meet with the oil barons was at the Tory fundraisers. That's that only place, because they were there at the fundraisers.

Let me say this, I think on behalf of all members of this House: We are angry about this. The environmentalists within the New Democratic Party would be saying, "We should be raising gas prices." I've heard them say that. Of course, it's a very fashionable—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Bradley: You're not really a New Democrat, because you're from East York as well as the Beaches, although I think the member for Beaches-East York is the future leader of the New Democratic Party. I want to say that to him.

But I think we've got consensus in the House that we're all angry about the gas prices in this province. The oil companies should be called on the carpet and told how unhappy we are about them, and any action that is legal and is possible should be taken to control these prices that are outlandish.

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I am pleased to have the opportunity to follow the Minister of Tourism and Recreation and respond somewhat to his comments. I would agree with him that in our constituencies, substantial numbers of people are very, very angry about gasoline prices, the fluctuation of gasoline prices, certainly. I think the fluctuation has an impact on our economy and there are reverberations felt throughout our economy.

I want to commend the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford for bringing forward this legislation. I think he brings it forward in the best tradition of private members' hour, representing his constituents and putting forward the plan and the idea that there needs to be a temporary freeze on gasoline prices.

As the member indicated, this is an idea that was pursued by a former government, a Progressive Conservative government, in 1974 in response to a serious increase in the gasoline prices at that time. I think it is quite right and proper that we would focus attention on this issue in the Legislature and quite right and proper that we would inquire what the government, if anything, is prepared to do about this problem. Certainly there have been speeches made in the past when Liberals were in opposition and New Democrats were in opposition, and I think we need to bring those ideas forward and inquire what exactly the government is prepared to do.

One thing the government could do is reduce the provincial tax on gas. Right now it is 14.3 cents a litre, I believe, if I am not mistaken.

Interjection: It's 14.7.

Mr Arnott: It's 14.7; I stand corrected. That is something that could be undertaken directly by legislation of this House, and I am sure that if the government brought forward a bill of that nature, it would enjoy the support of certainly the Progressive Conservative Party, and most likely the New Democrats as well. So I would leave that as an idea.

I know that my colleague the member for Simcoe North wants to participate in this debate as well, so once again, in closing, I will congratulate the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford for bringing forward this important legislation.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'd like to congratulate my colleague from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, a good friend of mine and a person who works very hard on behalf of his riding to make sure these types of issues are dealt with.

I have to very briefly comment on something the member for Waterloo-Wellington mentioned, and that is the fact that the provincial government in fact does have the ability to drop the sales tax. When we see the types of tax increases we have seen with things like the health premium, which is going to add probably $2,200—I'm sorry; let me rephrase that. The 2004 budget that was just recently presented will add approximately $2,000 to every working family in the province of Ontario in one form of taxation or another.

I think this is a real opportunity for the government when it is trying to rebuild the economy and trying to strengthen the aftermath of their budget. I think the proper and right thing to do is to actually drop the prices. However, I do believe with the interim freeze that the member has mentioned—I can remember sitting on the opposite side of the House when he was a member of the gas busters, and we had very minimum increases over those years. It was a difficult thing, a very difficult challenge he had. But since this government has taken power, we have seen about a 35% or 40% increase in the gas prices. Something must be done. We are not getting any leadership from Ottawa. Of course, we know they've got other problems, and we probably won't have a Liberal government in Ottawa very shortly. But the very fact of the matter is that we need leadership in this country. Based on the gas prices we are seeing here, Dalton McGuinty doesn't appear to be doing anything. We know that Paul Martin is doing nothing. So the official opposition will have to take the leadership role here.

I would ask that all members of this House support Mr Tascona's bill, Bill 48. It is an important bill, and I think that by implementing this, it will help rebuild the economy of the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford has two minutes to reply.

Mr Tascona: I want to thank all the members who spoke on the bill and debated it: the members for Sarnia-Lambton, Oxford, Beaches-East York, and Simcoe North, and also the Minister of Tourism. I would urge the members here today to vote for this bill. It is important to get to the bottom of what's going on with respect to the gasoline price industry.

The government should be expected to do more than what the Liberal member for Sarnia-Lambton says. She says they have a responsibility to meet and discuss. I would say they have a lot more of a responsibility than that to the taxpayers of this province. The member for

Oxford is correct: The time to act is now. It's the appropriate time to send a message to the big oil companies. As the member for Beaches-East York said, they have a reserve of 90 to 120 days. There's no relationship to the price of crude at the spot market. What we see is a price gouge, in his words, and wild fluctuations day to day.

1100

In the words of the Minister of Tourism, he states very clearly that he feels there's collusion at the gas pump. The problem is these high-price fluctuations. He indicates that there's no reflection of that in the price of crude oil. There's no relationship whatsoever.

I think the gas companies are very clever to mirror, saying it's the taxes. They also say that's it related to the price of crude oil, when they have a 90- to 120-day reserve.

The Minister of Tourism says, "NAFTA stops us from doing that." Well, it doesn't stop the province of PEI from setting gas prices, and it also didn't stop the Ontario government from setting hydroelectric prices.

So I would say to the members, let's pass this bill. Let's send a message to the oil companies that we're serious here. As the Minister of Tourism says, "They need to be put on the carpet." This is the way to do it.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I rise today to move the resolution that in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should do everything within its power to ensure that the Great Lakes, the largest source of fresh water in the world, be protected from pollution and degradation of all kinds, through appropriate legislation, monitoring and enforcement, and through intergovernmental relations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, the member for Stoney Creek has 10 minutes.

Ms Mossop: I had a dream the other night. I dreamt that I was very old and very frail, a grandmother sitting inside a small institutional room. There was a window, but I couldn't open it. In fact, it didn't open. It was made that way. I sat in a chair looking out. Through a sepia haze, I could see the lake, one of the Great Lakes of our planet.

Someone came in the room, and in my dream I knew that she was my granddaughter. She looked to be about seven years old. I asked her why she wasn't outside playing in the sun, on this summer day, down at the beach. She looked at me and furrowed her brow, a look of confusion and worry working her face.

"Granny," she said, "you know we can't go outside any more."

I nodded, remembering. I saw the pity in her young eyes. She climbed on to my knee and asked me to tell her again about what it was like in the days when we were allowed to go outside, in the days when you could feel the sun, still hot even in the late afternoon, warming our bare arms and legs, a gentle breeze ruffling our hair, the lake glistening and sparkling. Gradually the reflection of the light on it would turn the surface into a shimmering silver lamé. As the sun lowered itself to the horizon, it cast a path of gold across the water, ending at our feet at the shore. I told her, again, how it felt to plunge into the cold, clear water, the sense of invigoration, the sheer joy of playing like dolphins in the waves in the water.

I woke up from that dream, but it's a recurring nightmare for me.

Some in this House may remember that one of the key reasons I ran for election was what I was witnessing along the shores of our Great Lakes, particularly the shores of Lake Huron and Lake Ontario, where routinely beaches are closed to swimmers. In fact, on Lake Huron a stretch has been permanently closed. It is the canary in the coal mine. We're being given a clear signal that our health is threatened.

One of the highest rates of breast cancer in the world is found on the northern shore of Lake Ontario. It is a clear signal that we are at risk and something is going very, very wrong.

In my early days as a reporter in the Niagara region, I covered the aftermath of the Love Canal crisis. Poisons had leached out of an old industrial chemical landfill site into a neighbourhood, into people's basements. It was believed that those toxins and many others were finding their way into the Niagara River and Lake Ontario, the source of drinking water for millions of Canadians and Americans.

There was a reporter at the St Catharines Standard at the time by the name of Doug Draper. He covered the environment exclusively, and he raised my awareness of the damage already done and the need for stricter regulations. I started to focus my work on the issue. I visited the Centre for Inland Waters in Burlington and I saw fish that had tumours on their gills and on their lips. I remember interviewing government officials who stubbornly refused to acknowledge that our water was becoming a health risk. I covered the efforts of various groups like Operation Clean Niagara, which at the time was headed by Margherita Howe, to get governments at all levels to recognize the threat to our drinking water and to move to protect it.

I have watched over the years as the algae has become thicker and thicker on the shores of Lake Ontario. Then, unbelievably, it showed up in Lake Huron. Three short years ago, walking along the beach of Lake Huron, I had to pick my way among the dead and dying waterfowl and fish. It was a scene of carnage, a slaughter. Why? We don't really know why, because the resources to find out had been slashed from government and agency budgets.

I have watched over the last few years as the lake turned from crystal blue to cloudy green, yellow and brown. I watch as the population along the lakes grows, both humans and animals, both of them being housed in larger and more abundant structures. Small family farms have given way to factory farms. Small cottage communities are turning into suburbs. Fertilizers and pesticides are liberally applied to our land and our lawns,

lawns that are ethnically cleansed of all species but green blade grasses, as if people will be more worthy or perhaps die happier if they have spent much of their time and their money, and risked the health of their children and animals, to have a manicured and uniformly green lawn. Those substances eventually make it into our lakes in runoff.

Of course, there is the toxic particulate that falls from the sky in raindrops into our waterways, particulate from the smog created by an ever growing number of cars, cars that seem to get larger and larger, idling monsters on these ribbons of concrete, they seem to be, eating up much of our green space. There is particulate, too, from industrial smokestacks, especially the coal-fired generating plants supplying us with much more light and power than we actually need, but we consume it all with a gluttonous zeal. Despite all that light, we still cannot seem to see our folly.

If we do nothing as politicians, as government, as a society, as individuals, we should protect the elements that sustain our very lives, although at times I think our suicidal behaviour brings into question the worthiness of saving humanity.

We impale ourselves on our vanity and our foolhardiness, our petty little wants, our short-sighted visions. We fall victim to seductive fantasies of a utopian lifestyle. We've lost touch with what is essential. We bow to pressure groups and lobbyists who think only in the here and now. We destroy the very things that sustain our very lives. No matter how rich or how powerful or how influential or how popular or how beautiful or pious or self-righteous, no matter how good or worthy we are, we cannot live without clean water and clean air. None of us can.

It is possible to turn around this damage. I remember the International Joint Commission celebrating victory over the high levels of mercury in Lake Erie in the early 1980s. That proved that, if recognized and acknowledged, environmental damage can be reversed. Mother Nature's ability to rejuvenate is remarkable. In fact, when I'm feeling particularly despairing about what we are doing to our magnificent lakes, I take solace knowing that what we are doing will only serve to wipe us out, and without us around, the lakes and the rest of nature will have an opportunity to renew. Forever, the setting sun will cast its path of gold across the lake, even if we are not here to revel in its beauty.

I know the McGuinty government is moving in the right direction on water quality and air quality, and I mention both water and air quality because they are inextricably linked. I know that the Minister of the Environment, Leona Dombrowsky, understands the tragedy of permanently closed beaches along Lake Huron, and I know we are introducing many initiatives that will be addressed by my colleague the member from Perth-Middlesex. He'll be discussing those a little bit later.

I know we are moving to address the pollution of our lakes, and I know that this government gets it, but we must be ever vigilant. We cannot take our lakes and all they mean to our quality of life, to life itself, for granted. We must all, every one of us in this society, wake up and take responsibility for the damage we are collectively doing.

If not, I fear that one morning I will not wake up from my recurring nightmare: Those halcyon days in the sun with the breeze in our hair, swimming in the clean, clear water, will all be the stuff of lore, tales from granny.

1110

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on such an important issue. I would hope the member knows, although she's new to the Legislature, that there has been a great deal of action has taken place in this area already. I would hope the member knows that in June 2002, the Ontario-Canada five-year agreement to restore the Great Lakes took place, and $51.5 million was put in place at that time to support the Great Lakes basin ecosystem

Also, a number of years ago, $5 million was set aside to establish an agency called the Great Lakes Renewal Foundation. Their function at that time was to clean up the areas of concern. It was a joint commission between Ontario, Canada and the United States, talking about cleaning up the Great Lakes. This foundation was brought forward to help clean up these AOCs: areas of concern. They have spent a great number of hours of work on projects, including the ones in the St Clair River.

At the Bay of Quinte, I know they had Ducks Unlimited in as a partner, doing a lot of restoration in the marshes there. For those who don't realize it, marshes are one of the best ways to clean our waterways. As a matter of fact, I know of one place in Florida where they had problems with their water quality, with the taste and smell of their water. They put in a 50-acre marsh above where they got the water, and it cleaned up the water substantially. That's adding to it.

There are a lot of groups and organizations in the province of Ontario that are working very hard. In the member's own area, in the Randle Reef there was $1 million that was set aside, in the Hamilton area, because Hamilton Harbour was one of the most polluted areas in the Great Lakes. Also, $3.5 million and a lot of partners were brought forward in the Thunder Bay area, with Abitibi Consolidated, a lumber company, Canadian National Railway, as well as the Northern Wood Preservers, all contributing to the cleanup in that area.

Once upon a time, it was viewed that we could flush all this stuff down our streams. It takes a lot more than that. It's not just cleaning up the Great Lakes. It's the feeder streams. It's when we build houses and construction throughout Ontario. Everybody notices now how we have these ponds there. Once upon a time, we put up subdivisions and the water would go right into the streams. Then the banks would flood and cause problems later on. They've come to realize that what takes place, with all this blacktop and roof-top, with blacktop being driveways and roadways, and obviously roof-top is all the roofs—they collect water that used to seep into the system and then slowly drain into the water courses. As

we build these subdivisions, we eliminate those opportunities. Now they build these nice storm-water retention ponds in these areas to collect all that. Everybody thinks it looks great and wonderful, and it's nice, but there is a real reason why they have those.

Not only that, but you'll see the fountains there. People wonder why we have those fountains. The fountains are there because mosquitoes won't be able to breed in them. The way they use their proboscis to stick it into the air to catch air: The fountain stops that and it stops the breeding of mosquitoes to some extent in those areas.

So there's a lot of movement moving forward. Personally, this is an area I had a strong concern with, in my own riding and with other people around. It's an area where you have to start right at the youth. As a matter of fact, on Wednesday I had a classroom of kids going out. We released wild rainbow trout back into the Oshawa Creek. What I'm trying to do there is reinstitute the value of the stream system and the ecosystems within our community right in the schools. So as those kids grow, they learn.

We've done six schools in the riding so far this year. We take the kids down and we show them rainbow trout coming up to spawn in the stream. Some of the fish are 15 to 18 pounds. Then we take the eggs, put them in aquariums in the school, and then we let the eggs hatch. The kids watch the entire process. I provide a video and a classroom preparation document for the teachers in the schools. They do an entire learning subject in their curriculum with this.

Then, on Wednesday, there was the last school we were doing. We took the kids down and we actually released the rainbow trout back into the stream. They see the entire life cycle of that stream. They gain an understanding of how planting trees along the stream—we plant trees as well—actually adds to the entire benefit of this program because it slows the seepage that goes into the stream. It allows it to retain those waters so it doesn't flood. It shades the streams, providing cooling.

There are a lot of things happening that take place in this area. I know that a lot of companies have been actively getting involved. I know that the governments of Canada and Ontario and several private sector companies have signed a pollution prevention memorandum of understanding that aims to reduce emissions of priority toxic substances into the environment. Because of signed agreements like that, over 390,000 tonnes of toxic substances are no longer contributed back into the environment. There are a lot of things taking place in this area. All we have to do is look out and work with the companies.

In my own riding of Oshawa, I work with the city, Ducks Unlimited, OPG and the Great Lakes renewal trust fund foundation to rework with the Second Marsh in Oshawa. Actually, I work with the South Central Ontario Big Game Association in providing thousands of hours cleaning up the stream and the watercourse.

People don't realize what takes place here. It's an entire life cycle. It's like that show, the Lion King, where it talks about the "great circle of life." It all comes together there. In these areas you look at what takes place. We actually took out the log-jams there. What log-jams do in a river—people don't realize—is slow down the water, and as the water slows down, it heats up. Guess what happens when the water heats up? Bacteria start to grow. If you can increase that flow down through the streams into the Great Lakes so there's not so much stoppage and heating up, it will reduce the amount of bacteria growth.

I know there are a lot of members within my own caucus who wish to speak as well, so I'm going to share my time. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I am standing to support this bill and commend the member from Stoney Creek for what I think were very nice words. I don't have dreams like that that I ever remember. I have to tell you that. I wake up in the morning wondering what I dreamed. Although I know I dreamed, it's gone. Anyway, we support the protection of the Great Lakes. I think every rational human being on this planet would support the protection of our environment.

Having said that, there is no alternative but to accept the motion that is here and hope that the motion will trigger some further action, because we believe further action needs to be taken. It is not enough to say the nice things that I'm sure are going to be said here today, but there has to be a commitment by this government that goes well beyond what we saw in the budget that was presented in this House just a few weeks ago.

I invite the member who put forward the motion to turn to page 12 of the budget, because what you'll find on that page is something very chilling. You will find that the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment are both slated, this year, for a freeze in the expenditure. They will have to do what is necessary to protect the very Great Lakes that we hold dear. What is even worse on page 12 is that these are two of 15 ministries that between now and the year 2007-08 will actually see a reduction in the budget to the point of some 12%, so that they cannot even protect what they are doing today; they will be less and less able to protect in the years between now and 2007-08.

The statement is an excellent statement. The actions, though, belie what we are trying to do or what the member is trying to say. The same statement has already been made and in fact has been a part of the governance of this province since 1971—for 33 years—the Canada-Ontario agreement respecting the Great Lakes basin ecosystem, 1971. That act contains almost identical words to the motion that is put before us today. That act clearly set out in that time frame how we were to protect the Great Lakes.

There has been some good action. I remember as a boy not being able to swim at the beaches of Toronto at all, and now they're only closed down half the swimming season. I remember seeing no fish at all in the Don River, and now we do see some minor fish—no sport fish.

Interjection.

Mr Prue: Yes, but things are improving. I travel every year down the Don River as part of a group of canoeists who travel down from Lawrence Avenue to the lake, and you can see that the banks of the Don River are being cleaned up. You can see that Lake Ontario is a cleaner and better lake in the last number of years than it was in the past. But so much more remains to be done, and I am afraid that with the gutting of the environmental bills and ministries between this year and 2007-08, which has happened in this budget, all of the good wishes of the member from Stoney Creek will not happen and she will wake up from that dream saying, "We should have done more." That's really where we should be headed.

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In this very chamber, in April, the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Natural Resources stood up to announce that there was going to be some $13 million put into Great Lakes cleanup. I would have thought that was a good announcement, but it wasn't. In fact, all that was, was a reannouncement of what the Conservatives had promised in their $51 million spread out over five years. This year they had already promised $13 million. So what we got from a new government was nothing more than saying, "We are going to continue with the program of the previous government."

Now, it would have been worse, I will put it to you, had they announced, "We're going to cut that." But there was nothing new. There was no new commitment that had not already existed and been passed by this Legislature. It was the same old arguments, when in fact you recognize and I recognize, and most thinking people recognize, that we are simply not doing enough to protect the Great Lakes and the waters that flow into the Great Lakes. We are not protecting them enough for ourselves, and we are certainly not protecting them enough for our children and for those who come after us.

I put it to the member that although we will be supporting this motion, there are six things that we need to do, six actions that this Legislature must pass, six things that the government must find the money to do, if the wonderful words that she said are to have any meaning at all.

The first is that we need to have a separate office for the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are, of course, as she put it in her motion, the largest single source of freshwater in the world. They are not in and amongst themselves the largest lakes—because the Caspian Sea is, for anyone who's a good geographer—but Lake Superior and right down to the smallest lake, Lake Ontario, are magnificent and huge bodies of water, and have enormous potential, not only to provide fresh water to communities, but also to have a full range and ecosystem of life, support a huge development of fisheries, a huge development of birds and all of the life that comes from a water environment. And it is simply not there. There are too many places where those ecosystems are damaged, and too many places where there are problems.

We need to have a separate office that looks only at the Great Lakes and can work in conjunction with the Canadian government, the state Legislatures and the American government, to make sure that those are cleaned up and are made at least as good as they were, at least as pure and as clean and as vibrant as they were when people first started to settle on these shores. I should say, when western people first started to live on these shores. I'm sure that our native Canadians treated the lakes with much greater respect than we of European heritage did in subsequent years.

The second thing we need to do is have real plans and funding to look at invasive species. We can read every day in the newspaper about some of those invasive species that have found their way into the Great Lakes systems. We know about the lampreys and how they completely devastated the lake trout industry and fishery in the Great Lakes. We know about zebra mussels and how they, although they appear to be cleaning up the water a little, or making it clearer, are also making it much more difficult for many, many fish species to continue to exist, particularly walleye fisheries around the Bay of Quinte. We know about other invasive species that are finding their way in—everything from quagqa mussels to fish—round gobies—spiny water fleas, all of those things that are finding their way into the Great Lakes that ought not to be there. We need to have real plans to get rid of them and we need to have the funding to do it. There has been funding for many years, as an example, for getting rid of the sea lampreys, by using lampricide, but we also need to find other ways of making sure those invasive species do not grab hold and drive out the native species from our lakes.

We need to look and have plans and real funding to make sure that contaminated discharge is looked after. A great amount of contaminated discharge continues to flow into the lake. Places like Love Canal are not unique. Love Canal was discovered, but there are others that we don't know about but that we need to know about.

We need to also look at a real problem that is emerging, and that is in terms of pharmaceutical discharge. People don't look at this. We have no real plans for pharmaceutical discharge and how that is going to impact life in all of the Great Lakes. We need to have some plans and funds for at least these three things.

The next item we need to look at is to restore the Great Lakes program. The Great Lakes program was largely gutted by the previous government in the middle 1990s. The Great Lakes program needs to be reintroduced and it needs to be funded. There is no money in this current budget, and perhaps no one thought that it was needed. But with the passage of this motion, I am asking the members opposite, in discussing the budget bill—and we heard yesterday that it may go out to committee—to actually look for money for restoring the Great Lakes program.

We are asking next that there be remedial plans. The Canadian Environmental Law Association says that in order to remediate the Great Lakes—those that are in the province; there are four of them—we need to have remedial plans to bring back the lakes where there are

problems. Those remedial plans are going to cost about $1.9 billion, if the Great Lakes are to be restored. That is a lot of money for a government that is struggling to find it. That is a lot of money. I'm sure it's going to take place, not in one budget year, but over many budget years, in order that the Great Lakes can be revived and in order that that little girl can go out and swim in the lake that was in the dream. It certainly cannot be done with just statements that we want it to happen. It's going to take a government budget that is a good deal more enlightened on the environment and natural resources than the one we saw introduced here a couple of weeks ago.

We know that the remediation needs to be improved. The previous government passed a $51-million plan to help the Great Lakes over five years. And it has worked to some extent—I'm not going say it hasn't worked—but it certainly is not enough. If we are to do the whole job, the Canadian Environmental Law Association says we need $1.9 billion, and I would think it should be spent sooner rather than later. That might be an amount over 10 or 20 years, but it certainly needs to be spent. They assess the cost of remediating Hamilton harbour alone—and I think the member from Stoney Creek will be interested in this—at running somewhere between $545 million and $600 million, if that is to be a clean and safe harbour, if you are to swim in and around the beaches or areas of Hamilton, Stoney Creek and the like, if you are to have fish that you can catch and eat, if you are to have sports fishing and all the things that we would like to think that you can go out and do on Lake Ontario.

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So what I am saying is that the words are good. The action that we need to take is clear to us; we have to have the resolve as a Legislature and the resolve as a government party—you being in the government party—to literally put your money where your mouth is, because I am afraid that we know the problem but that we can conveniently sometimes as people turn and say that it may go away, that Mother Nature is wonderful and can remediate herself—and of course she can. But she can't remediate herself when there are invasive species. She cannot remediate herself when there is pharmaceutical dumping, she can't remediate herself when there are discharges we don't know about and she certainly can't remediate herself in the presence of human beings without those same human beings having the wherewithal to spend the necessary funds to assist Mother Nature as the population grows, as the number of people on the planet increases, as new housing subdivisions are being built in and around Ontario, as we continue our love affair with the car, as acid rain falls, and the 100,000 other things we do that we should not do to our Great Lakes.

In the minute that is left, I would like to commend the member for Stoney Creek for her thoughtful analysis of where we should go. She has set out very well what a grandmother might see through sepia windows—I haven't heard that word in a long time—and how she would like to leave a legacy for her granddaughter. I would like to reiterate, though, that the problem is not in the dream, the problem is in the action that will follow that dream. If the dream was a wake-up dream—and we've seen many stories in history where a dream has set someone to great action or forewarned them about a future they were able to divert—let this be one you are able to divert. Go back to your caucus, go back to the cabinet ministers and tell them that the amount of money that is being spent on the Great Lakes cleanup is not sufficient for that little girl.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I'm pleased to stand and support the member for Stoney Creek, and I thank her for bringing this motion forward. Each of us in this House has some tools at our disposal to bring forward issues that are extremely important to us. I have to say that this is something that is also near and dear to my heart. As you know, I have a constituency that is at the tip of Lake Huron and into the St Clair River. As well, we have the petrochemical industry there. We have a clustering of industry there that is the largest in Canada.

You may not know this, but when I was in opposition, one of my biggest battles was trying to get stricter standards for the disposal of hazardous waste. Why? Because it's about the future, it's about degrading our environment, our habitat. I don't want to have the nightmare you spoke of—you called it a dream; I call it a nightmare. I have to say that one of the more frightening aspects of what's happening in this election is the fact that the Kyoto accord is not going to be—it's an issue federally. Yesterday I heard Mr Harper say that he doesn't agree with the Kyoto accord and that we don't have to do this.

Each one of us has a responsibility for the future, and you're absolutely right when you say that if we cannot have clean water and clean air, then there is no purpose, in my opinion, in government. Government has to have the will to leave this a better place than we found it.

I know that our government is doing a great deal in my area, with the spills action team. We have a SWAT team. You talked about the Love Canal. Those standards for disposal of hazardous waste came about in the United States because of the Love Canal.

As I say, I certainly pressed the former government. I'm really thrilled to know that we're taking at least one step further and that we are going to have stricter rules for the disposal of hazardous waste very shortly in this province, which is another step in taking that nightmare away. Hopefully, we can improve this place because of the direction this government is going.

I thank you for bringing this forward and reminding all of us that we have a responsibility here to do something about it and not just to talk about it. One more thing I have to say in respect to the Great Lakes is, that certainly is a hot point where we have to stop these spills that go into the lakes, and we have to stop these emissions that go into the air. We can only do that through regulatory stewardship, if you want, that government imposes.

I thank you very much for bringing it forward. I'll certainly support it, and I know that we, as a government—I wouldn't be a Liberal; I wouldn't be here if I didn't think our government is committed to cleaner air and cleaner water.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I'm pleased to address this motion from the member for Stoney Creek. I think it goes without saying that everyone in this House would agree that this government should continue to do everything in its power to ensure the Great Lakes are protected from pollution. Quite simply, it's essential that the efforts continue. The Great Lakes are a natural resource for environmental reasons, but they also support so much of Ontario's and Canada's economy.

I think of Canadian industries, and we certainly know of cases of industrial pollution. Of course, we bear in mind the $100-million commercial fishery that is supported by the Great Lakes, and the recreational fishing industry comes in to the tune of $300 million a year in revenue. That's why our government—and this goes back certainly to 1972, previous Tory governments dating back to the Canada-Ontario agreement respecting the Great Lakes basin ecosystem. We've introduced a number of measures coming from that, and continued to do that up till last fall.

In June 2002, Ontario and Canada announced the five-year agreement to protect and restore the Great Lakes basin, and in 2002, our government alone committed $51.5 million over five years. Certainly on this side of the House, we trust that the new government will carry on that five-year commitment and that minimum commitment of $51.5 million respecting the Great Lakes ecosystem.

Provincially, so many ministries are involved: certainly the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture—measures and funding that came out of much of the nutrient management concerns—and, of course, the Ministry of the Environment. The five-year agreement does set aggressive targets to clean up the Great Lakes, and co-operation and sharing is very important in that regard.

I'd also like to mention that while this motion addresses the Great Lakes, there are other lakes in the province of Ontario. And lo and behold, with the recently introduced Adams mine legislation we have a whole new definition for lakes. I don't know whether this kind of resolution could handle the kind of definition coming from the Adams Mine Lake Act. In fact, the definition is found in section 7: A lake is now defined as "a body of surface water that ... results from human activities, and ... directly influences or is directly influenced by ground water," and is larger than one hectare—that's about 2.2 acres.

I'm wondering about these other sites, other lakes by this definition: obviously no new landfill or refuse will be going into these man-made, defined lakes. However, there are many bodies of water out there under this new definition that contain garbage, and given that we have this new definition, will this legislation be broadened to encompass the cleanup of all these newly defined lakes—pits, quarries, gravel pits, iron ore mines, whether it be Dofasco or Stelco? Under this new definition of "lake," are we now looking at committing to cleaning up all these other existing sites? I'll leave that for members to deliberate.

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I, of course, speak in favour of this motion. The motion of the member for Stoney Creek is more of a vision statement for this Assembly. The member from Lambton—Sarnia-Lambton, I should say; I'm the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex—was also talking to her constituents. She and I share the same lakeshore. Our constituents live along the St Clair River. There certainly has been a lot of media focus on the issues of water and air pollution in that area.

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There was a great deal of concern last summer, in August, when there was a spill that affected the people of Walpole Island and Wallaceburg. There was an initial panic when people realized what could potentially be in their tap water, in their drinking water. But even beyond the panic comes the anxiety and frustration of the people in my constituency and in my riding. They argue among themselves about what should be done. They argue among themselves within their own families about what to do. Some are living with only bottled water. They've now refused to drink water from their taps.

As a young person, I would never have believed that some day I would pay for bottled water, and yet we do it all the time now. It has become part of our life. Yet, 20 years ago someone would have said I was crazy to pay good money for water. It was available in abundance, and everybody expected that. But that is no longer the case. My grandchildren see bottled water as a normal part of their lives, and I find that really frightening. Where we thought getting something like pop or chocolate milk was a great thing, they think water is a great thing. That tells me something about how we've changed as a culture. We no longer have the confidence that we should have in our tap water.

In my constituency, we also have issues of air pollution and issues of fly ash that comes from the stacks in the industries in my area. That has brought about a lot of concerns among farmers in my community, who see this ash floating on to their crops, on to the hay fields, and that hay, in turn, is fed to the cows and gets into the milk. There's worry about what's going to happen and if it is really impacting. We are told it isn't, but there's always that gnawing fear, that concern that somewhere there might be something getting through.

We've had studies done in my community, actually by a former federal member, the Honourable Ralph Ferguson, who did studies on the incidence of cancer in his farm community of Alvinston, in Brooke. They found a higher incidence of cancer there compared to neighbouring communities. They're trying to find out what's causing this. Why are we seeing pockets of increased cancer incidence in certain areas and not in others?

We heard earlier in private members' business about an act that would ask us to freeze gas prices. I have concerns about such things. I know we all drive vehicles, and we talk about gas and that we need to have something that's affordable. But if we freeze gas prices, we encourage people to continue to buy gas and not look for alternative fuel sources to power our vehicles. Are we necessarily doing a good thing there?

I hope we can learn from the things we have seen in the past and that we will be able to clean up our environment. I thank the member for Stoney Creek for bringing forward her motion.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I want to speak on this resolution with respect to the Great Lakes and just point out a couple of facts on the record. I note in the budget speech that the Minister of Finance, Greg Sorbara, says that between 2004-05 and 2007-08 the budgets of 15 ministries are either being flatlined or decreased. Natural resources and environment are among those 15 ministries. So that raises a question about anything the government would want to do with the Great Lakes that costs money.

Another fact, and I report it out of the Windsor Star of August 22, 2003, is that a subsidiary of Minister of Finance Greg Sorbara's former company, Royal Group Technologies, was responsible for three chemical spills into the St Clair River last year. In 2003, Royal Polymers, a Royal Group subsidiary, was responsible for three chemical spills, two in August and one in November. The company failed to notify the Ministry of the Environment of the spills for several days.

In the article it states, "... from Royal Polymers of Sarnia entered the water system and almost a week after an initial spill during the power blackout on Thursday.

"While the chemical would not have contaminated the water supply by the time it reached the Windsor area, city water officials are concerned they weren't notified immediately." That's a quote of Saad Jasim, director of water quality and production for the Windsor Utilities Commission.

"'The MOE was not informed about the spill until well after the fact,' Jasim said. 'We still don't know a lot of the details ... but there was an unfortunate communication gap'" about this major issue.

"Despite the fact the MOE spill hotline was up and running on generator power during the initial blackout—and officials were receiving calls about sewage spills and other emergencies—they did not receive word about the Royal Polymer incidents until late Tuesday, said John Steele, ministry spokesman.

"'Whenever there is a chemical spill the (ministry) action centre must be notified immediately,'" Mr Steele said. "'And we were not. This incident has been turned over to our investigations branch.'"

That was on August 22, 2003, from the Windsor Star.

From the Sarnia Observer, November 27, 2003:

"Royal Polymers Ltd discharged an estimated 828 kilograms of toxic vinyl chloride to the air Saturday morning after a process computer failed. The company notified the Ministry of the Environment and says it called local radio stations the same day.

"But a news release wasn't issued until Tuesday morning and the four-sentence summary the Observer received explained little about the incident and nothing about its impact. Royal Polymers is already under investigation by the environment ministry for failing to immediately report a chemical spill to the St Clair River this summer." That's as I quoted with the Windsor Star, which was in August 2003, and here we have in November 2003, from the Sarnia Observer, the actions of Royal Polymers, which is a Royal Group subsidiary—as indicated earlier, Minister of Finance Greg Sorbara's former company—with respect to these spills into the Great Lakes without notifying the Ministry of the Environment. Quite frankly, that is really, really difficult to understand, that type of irresponsible conduct which was being reported in the Windsor Star in August 2003 and then again in the Sarnia Observer in November 2003.

So I think the member who has put forth this resolution should be talking to her Minister of Finance, should be talking to her government, because quite frankly, they have no intention of doing anything about the Great Lakes. They have flatlined the spending for natural resources and the environment, and in fact there are actions going on on the Great Lakes with respect to the Ministry of the Environment that are not being reported. They have a hotline to make sure that things are reported about spills and also what's going into the air with respect to discharges from this particular company. So I would say that the member is good-intentioned, but I don't think her government is.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to speak to this resolution today; and certainly the previous speaker trying to give us lessons on environmental protection was worth the price of admission this morning.

I don't think there's a resolution, I don't think there's anything you can do, that's more pro-business for the province of Ontario than to have a clean, strong environment.

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It's not just words. Everybody, I think, had "green" in their last campaign slogans. Politicians seem to think that if you drop "green" into every second sentence, then you're doing something good for the environment. But, certainly, it's action that's got to be taken.

As it is on most environmental issues, and as it has been for the last eight years in this province, the politicians have been lagging far behind the public, when you're looking at the urban impact of growth on the Great Lakes. There's nothing as basic as clean water to sustain life. There's no business—not one business—that could operate in this province without clean water, and we just have to look at examples.

In my own community, we found we had a problem with algae in the Great Lakes, on the shoreline. It was impacting the local economy. It was impacting the lifestyles of those who lived close to the shoreline. Simply, it was fouling the shores. Who led the charge on

that? It was not the local politicians. It was certainly not the provincial government at the time, the previous Eves-Harris government. In fact, I'm not even sure if we could get anyone to answer the phone during those years. It was the people in Halton. The people in Halton came together and formed what's called the Lake Ontario Shoreline Algae Action Committee, which eventually drew the support of local politicians, Conservation Halton and the University of Waterloo.

Now we're going into what's called a yellow fish program. Most of the storm sewers in the urban areas in Oakville and Burlington will have a yellow fish painted on them this summer. The idea is that before you pour anything down a storm sewer, you remember that it's going to find its way into the lake. You remember that there's wildlife in that lake. You remember that that lake's part of our ecosystem.

So I am so pleased to see a resolution as forward-thinking as this. Hopefully this signals a change, a turnaround from the previous eight years of environmental mess we've lived with.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I'm delighted, as the newly minted parliamentary assistant to the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, the Minister of the Environment, to speak to the member from Stoney Creek's resolution.

Our government is committed to higher standards of numeracy and literacy. We're committed to that. But, for some people, it's a little bit too late. I had the member for Beaches-East York say to this House that somehow, on page 12 of the budget, we were reducing our financial commitment to the Ministry of the Environment. Then the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford had to jump in as well, because some people obviously have trouble with literacy and numeracy. He also agreed with the member that somehow there wasn't a commitment.

I refer you to page 71 of the budget papers, under operating expenses for the Ministry of the Environment: last year, under the previous regime, $260 million; this year, $304 million. Now, where I come from, that's an increase. That's not a decrease. I look at the capital budget of the Ministry of the Environment: $4 million with the previous government. What are we spending? It's $13 million. To walk into this House and talk about page 12, and you can't find your way to page 71 and page 72—my God, that's amazing.

I want you to know that the Ministry of the Environment is committed to the resolution today. I want to remind the members of the House that in April the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Natural Resources reinforced that commitment with a $13-million investment, that this government is supporting the cleanup of contaminated sediment in Ontario's 15 identified problem areas, known as the Great Lakes area of concern.

Our government is committed to developing a renewed relationship with both the federal government and the Great Lakes governors to protect this shared resource, and we're meeting our commitments under the Canada-Ontario agreement on Great Lakes water quality. Source protection will help protect lakes and the many smaller watersheds that feed them, and source protection plans will help prevent the excess buildup of harmful pollutants.

But I wanted to say to the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, now that I've been able to develop the corporate message, I want to talk from the heart. There was a previous government in this land that slashed—slashed—the Ministry of the Environment's budget by a third. Half of the people were gone. What did we get from that? We had a government that sent a signal that they weren't committed to the environment. There are families in this province who paid a tremendous price for that decision.

Our government is committed to the environment. Our government—

Mr Tascona: Point of order.

Mr Wilkinson: Go right ahead.

Mr Tascona: Mr Speaker, can you have the member speak to the resolution? He's not even remotely close to it.

Mr Wilkinson: Oh, the truth hurts, my God, and I only have 59 seconds left.

I want to let you know that the first bill introduced by my ministry, the Adams Mine Lake Act, Bill 49, says to the world that we don't take trash, dump it in the aquifer and then somehow figure that it's not going to end up being in the Great Lakes. That's why we passed that act. I might mention that the opposition voted against that—not the NDP, but the Progressive Conservatives.

Now, why would they do that? Because they still haven't got the message of the last election, that the people of Ontario want a government that protects the environment, that puts more resources into it.

I want to commend the member for Stoney Creek. That's why I want to commend her for this. I urge all members that they should vote on this resolution, because Ontario will want to know whether a previous government has learned the lesson.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Stoney Creek has two minutes to reply.

Ms Mossop: I want to thank all the speakers today, who largely greeted my tales from granny with the spirit in which thay were delivered. A lot of dollar figures have been thrown about—how much money was spent, how much money is being spent, how much money should be spent—but there are two things that are far more important in this.

The first one is education. We all have to understand exactly what we are doing when we pollute our lakes. We have to understand that in every choice we make, in every decision we make, in every action, if we are polluting our lakes, what we are doing is akin to manslaughter—period.

The second thing that we need to do—and I found this out when I went to a conference in Hamilton recently on heritage. It was largely about heritage buildings, and the preservation of heritage buildings, but a world expert was

there, author Anthony Tung. He travelled all over the world to determine why some places, some societies, were more successful at preserving their heritage, both man-made and natural, than other societies.

The answer was simple: The ones that were successful had binding laws that said, "No, you cannot do that. There are no exceptions. There are no appeals." You can throw all of the money in the world at the problem, but if you don't have a binding law, you will not have any success at all—period.

I understand that it's important to have money for the enforcement and all the rest, but the bottom line is we have to all understand, every one of us, the intrinsic value of our lakes to the very lives of all of us, now and in the future. We have to reflect that in a binding law that says, "No, you cannot pollute the lakes—period." Thank you for the mathematics, the arithmetic, and all the rest, but my efforts will be focused with this government, and all other governments, to have binding laws to protect our future.

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS PRICE FREEZE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE GEL DU PRIX DE CERTAINS PRODUITS PÉTROLIERS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We shall deal first with ballot item number 25, standing in the name of Mr Tascona.

Mr Tascona has moved second reading of Bill 48, An Act to provide for an interim freeze in the price of certain petroleum products.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will call in the members after we've dealt with the next ballot item.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We'll now deal with ballot item number 26, standing in the name of Ms Mossop.

Ms Mossop has moved that in the opinion of the House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should do everything within its power to ensure that the Great Lakes, the largest source of fresh water in the world, be protected from pollution and degradation of all kinds, through appropriate legislation, monitoring and enforcement, and through intergovernmental relations.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I thought I heard a no.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

I actually need some help. I thought I heard a no in that. It's a no. OK, thank you. I've gotten my assistance now.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS PRICE FREEZE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE GEL DU PRIX DE CERTAINS PRODUITS PÉTROLIERS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Tascona has moved second reading of Bill 48, an Act to provide for an interim freeze in the price of certain petroleum products.

All those in favour will please stand.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Di Cocco, Caroline	McMeekin, Ted
Barrett, Toby	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McNeely, Phil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hardeman, Ernie	Mossop, Jennifer F.
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Brownell, Jim	Kwinter, Monte	Prue, Michael
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Rinaldi, Lou
Craitor, Kim	Martel, Shelley	Ruprecht, Tony
Dhillon, Vic	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please stand.

Nays

Baird, John R.	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Caplan, David	Patten, Richard	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Racco, Mario G.	Wilkinson, John
Gerretsen, John	Sandals, Liz	Wong, Tony C.
Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 24; the nays are 17.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, the bill is referred to—

Mr Tascona: I'd like it referred to the standing committee on agencies, boards and commissions.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Tascona has moved that the bill be referred to the committee on agencies, boards and commissions.

I hear a no.

All those in favour, please stand and remaining standing. Take your seats.

All those opposed will stand and remain standing. Take your seats.

A majority of the House being opposed, this bill will be referred to the committee of the whole.

Mr Tascona: I'd move that it be put to the Legislative Assembly committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that this motion—

I heard a no.

The doors will be open for 30 seconds before we deal with ballot item number 26.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Ms Mossop has moved that in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should do everything within its power to ensure that the Great Lakes, the largest source of fresh water in the world, be protected from pollution and degradation of all kinds, through appropriate legislation, monitoring and enforcement, and through intergovernmental relations.

All those in favour will please stand.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Patten, Richard
Baird, John R.	Jeffrey, Linda	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Kwinter, Monte	Racco, Mario G.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Marsales, Judy	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Martel, Shelley	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Martiniuk, Gerry	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Craitor, Kim	McMeekin, Ted	Tascona, Joseph N.
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mossop, Jennifer	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	O'Toole, John	Wong, Tony C.
Gerretsen, John	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please stand.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 42; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1212 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TREE PLANTING IN WELLINGTON COUNTY

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I want to inform the House of a very special celebration taking place in 2004, that being the county of Wellington's 150th anniversary. To mark this occasion, our county came up with a fabulous idea: As a lasting green legacy, 150,000 trees would be planted in Wellington.

Over a two-week period, school classes, municipalities, service clubs and private landowners took part, planting trees throughout our scenic and beautiful county. Other key partners in the project included the Grand River Conservation Authority, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Wellington County Stewardship Council, and both of Wellington county's school boards. For their part in planting this living and lasting legacy that will improve the environment in Wellington county for generations to come, they all deserve enormous credit.

I'm very proud and glad to support this important initiative. We all know the importance of planting trees, and if greenhouse gases and excess carbon dioxide are a problem, humankind around the world should respond by planting hundreds of thousands, even millions, of trees. Wellington county has shown the way.

I want to thank and acknowledge Wellington county Warden Linda White, who a few days ago planted a sugar maple, tree number 150,000, as well as county council for their leadership that has improved the environment for our children and grandchildren. Chief administrative officer Scott Wilson and county staff also deserve recognition on a job well done and for a program that should be adopted by other municipalities across the province.

TIME ALLOCATION

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Here it is: We're in time allocation. The government, while in opposition, purportedly said they were going to start a new Legislature and find a new way to make sure that members of the assembly all had an opportunity to participate fully in debate. They said they were opposed to time allocation motions. I remember those speeches. I remember Dwight Duncan, the now government House leader, and a whole bunch of others who used to stand up in opposition to time allocation.

What's the time allocation motion? Surprise, surprise, it's on the budget. Let me tell the government House leader something. I see this as nothing more than an attempt to cut short debate on the budget bill so that you can try to put that under the radar screen, so that your federal cousins, who are all yelling at you for having done the most unpopular budget in the history of Ontario, can somehow get through this federal election.

It ain't going to work. At the end of the day, there has to be a democratic process. You're the guys who stood for transparency and said you were basically not going to do time allocation and were going to change the way we do business in the Legislature of Ontario.

I'm here today to say there is no change. Your government has introduced time allocation. The budget will be a done deal by Thursday of next week. I say to the government, you can try to hide your unpopular budget all you want in this federal election, but at the end of the day people get it and they're going to turf out Liberals across Ontario, not only because of Paul Martin but also what this government has done with that budget and all their broken promises.

SOCCER

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): Every summer, people across the province look forward to a number of world-class sporting events. This year, the European soccer championship, or football as it is known around the world, will be held in Portugal and will begin this Saturday, when Portugal faces Greece in the city of Porto, and will culminate in Lisbon on July 4, 2004, with the championship game.

These tournaments bring Ontario's vast ethnic diversity to the forefront, as soccer fans, either born elsewhere or having parents or grandparents born elsewhere, come together across the province. Soccer is one of the most vastly played recreational sports in our province, played by children and adults alike.

Cafes and restaurants across the GTA will be serving food like Greek souvlaki, Portuguese churassco barbecued chicken or tasty German frankfurters while fans cheer for their favourite team. In my own riding of Scarborough Southwest, I will be witnessing cars driving along Kingston Road, carrying their English flags, their Dutch flags, their Croatian flags and flags from countries all over the world.

Most importantly, this tournament represents fair play between nations. In our province, this will be seen as an overwhelming sense of coming together by people from different cultures and different countries as they celebrate world class sport and ethnic diversity in Ontario. I'm extremely proud of Ontario's ethnic diversity.

I encourage every member in this Legislature to participate in cheering on their favourite team and to encourage the sharing of cultures in their constituencies. Hopefully, Ontario and Canada will one day host a world-class event like the World Cup of soccer.

DIALYSIS

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I rise today to urge the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to fulfill his budget promise to make dialysis treatment a health-care priority, and to sign off on the capital improvement for the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital satellite dialysis unit.

His ministry has already approved the unit and committed operational dollars to it. The community has shown its support by raising all the funds necessary to purchase the equipment—over $700,000. Now everyone is waiting, and has been waiting for some time, for this minister to allow the rooms to be renovated.

When this government was in opposition, the now minister, Ms Pupatello, came to Tillsonburg and stated clearly to the citizens and the media that if they became government, they would not play political football with something as serious as dialysis treatment. Now it's becoming clear that this is exactly what is happening.

Perhaps Minister Pupatello could talk to Minister Smitherman and impress upon him how important this is to people like Ed DeSutter who suffers not only from the ravages of his disease, but from the stress of constant travel to get the life-saving treatment he needs.

Young and old, people from three counties have been waiting patiently for this minister to take action. I have submitted a petition signed by thousands for that action to take place as soon as possible.

I ask the minister not to make this a political football, but to think of the citizens of this province who want to enjoy a better quality of life without further delay. I ask him to make good on his budget promise to make dialysis treatment a priority and make it possible to receive treatment closer to home for these very sick people.

MARKHAVEN HOME FOR SENIORS

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I rise to congratulate Markhaven, a long-term-care facility in my riding of Markham, on its grand opening this past weekend. I would also like to thank Minister Smitherman for coming out to Markham in support of this very important event.

Markhaven was founded in 1960, when a nurse named Lois Neely and her husband welcomed seniors into their home. With an increased need for long-term-care facilities in Markham, the board of directors expanded and rebuilt Markhaven in 1970. By 1996 it was evident that a larger facility was urgently needed.

Markhaven's celebration this past weekend was the result of a very successful community-based fundraising drive. I wish to acknowledge the hard work of many people involved with the successful reopening of Markhaven, including Ralph Aselin, Pauline Loney, Eric Tappenden and Harry James. I thank them for their dedication and support that ensure Markhaven continues to provide Markham seniors with valuable and high-quality service. As a member of the fundraising committee for its gala last year, I was impressed by the enthusiasm of Markhaven's staff and volunteers.

In addition to having Markhaven as a valuable part of their community, Markham's seniors will also benefit enormously because the Liberal government is fulfilling its promise to seniors by creating thousands of additional long-term-care beds, 12,000 bed-lifts for hospitals and long-term-care facilities, and an additional investment in long-term care of $406 million, that will grow to $546 million by 2007-08.

Seniors in Markham recognize that this government, working in partnership with institutions such as Markhaven, is fulfilling its promises to provide them with access to timely medical services and a higher quality of life.

NIAGARA FALLSVIEW CASINO RESORT

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): On Tuesday I had the honour of opening the new Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort, located in the heart of my riding in Niagara Falls. There are now 6,500 people directly employed at the Fallsview casino and Casino Niagara, which has been open since 1996. Last year, Premier McGuinty announced Casino Niagara would remain open, giving Niagara Falls two more attractions and all the economic benefits that go along with them.

The new Fallsview casino is a real gem for the city of Niagara Falls. It is on 10 hectares of land overlooking the magnificent falls and was built as a complete entertainment centre, including a theatre, convention centre and a new luxury hotel. The Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort is now officially open to the public today.

1340

When the casino was being built, it was listed as the second-largest construction site in Canada, behind the new terminal at Pearson International Airport. During the construction, the Niagara Falls casino used 85,000 cubic metres of concrete, 7,500 tonnes of structural steel and 7,000 tonnes of reinforcing steel.

I would like to invite all the members here, across Ontario and across Canada to come to Niagara this summer and marvel at the Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort as well as the Niagara Parks Commission attractions, our world-class golf courses, our award winning wineries and the magic of the Shaw Festival.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Yesterday at Queen's Park literally hundreds of people from across the province came—

Laughter.

Mr Klees: —and the members laugh. The House leader laughs, and members of the opposition laugh. Let me tell you, folks, your constituents are not laughing. You're trying to shrug off what the people of this province consider a very serious transgression: a government that shrugs off the responsibility to keep the law.

There were people here yesterday who travelled from right across the province to send a very strong signal to this government: first, that they expect that their government, which is charged with the responsibility to keep the law, will in fact keep the law; that the Premier, who is the chief person in this province responsible for upholding the law, should uphold the law, namely the Taxpayer Protection Act, which he has broken.

The Premier of this province should be listening, and his backbenchers should be listening, rather than laughing at the people of this province when they say to them, "Keep the law of the land."

If you're going to have a tax increase, at least do it in accordance with the act in place in this province. The people of this province have rated this Premier the least-trustworthy Premier ever to hold the office in the province of Ontario. It's because he has no respect for the law.

PORTUGUESE CANADIAN COMMUNITY

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Today is a very special day for me. I rise today not only as the provincial member of Parliament of Mississauga East but also as a Portuguese Canadian MPP. Today marks the third anniversary of Portuguese History and Heritage Month here in Ontario.

May I take this opportunity to thank those of you who joined my guests and I as we raised the flag of Portugal here at Queen's Park earlier today. Today's event has been but one of many events being held right across the province in honour of Portugal's heritage, an opportunity for people of Portuguese origin to celebrate their heritage and, perhaps more importantly, to share their culture with others.

Last year marked the 50th anniversary of the first Portuguese pioneers. It was a chance to reflect on the trials, tribulations and successes of those first Portuguese immigrants. It was because of their hard work, struggles and determination that we are able to celebrate today.

This year, I chose to celebrate the next 50 years, an opportunity to recognize the accomplishments of Portuguese Canadian youth, as well as a call to the youth of Portuguese heritage in Ontario to continue the work that has been begun by their parents and grandparents.

Portuguese Canadians have contributed so much to our success as a province, and we have so much more to offer. Please join me in thanking those first pioneers—the celebration of Portuguese heritage here in Ontario.

KYOTO PROTOCOL

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I was shocked yesterday when Stephen Harper, leader of the federal Tories, said that he would scrap the adoption of the Kyoto accord. Mr Harper said, "Carbon dioxide, while linked to global warming, is not a threat to air quality."

Where does that come from? Most scientists concede that the burning of fossil fuels emissions is increasing the earth's temperature, leading to smog in many cities, including my own, Hamilton.

Elizabeth May, executive director of the Sierra Club of Canada, said Harper's plan to abandon Kyoto is foolhardy: "Acting as though air pollution and climate change are separate issues is both bad policy and bad science."

Smog can cause eye irritation and shortness of breath, and for people with asthma such as myself it means having to be confined indoors if the air quality is poor.

I'm proud to say that our government understands the importance of the Kyoto accord. We are committed to doing our part in Ontario to ensure that Canada lives up to the accord. We have already made our emissions standards for large diesel trucks and buses the toughest in North America, and we will generate 5% of Ontario's energy from renewable sources by 2007. So I ask you, where did he become a scientist?

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery the consul general of Portugal, Dr Artur Magalhaes, on the occasion of Portuguese History and Heritage Day. Please join me in welcoming him here.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on general government and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 27, An Act to establish a greenbelt study area and to amend the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001 / Projet de loi 27, Loi établissant une zone d'étude de la ceinture de verdure et modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur la conservation de la moraine d'Oak Ridges.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL

Mr Watson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 96, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act / Projet de loi 96, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I'll speak during ministerial statements.

1350

FIRST NATIONS RESOURCE REVENUE SHARING ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE PARTAGE AVEC LES PREMIÈRES NATIONS DES RECETTES TIRÉES DE L'EXPLOITATION DES RESSOURCES

Mr Bisson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act respecting the sharing of resource revenues for First Nations / Projet de loi 97, Loi concernant le partage avec les Premières nations des recettes tirées de l'exploitation des ressources.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): This bill attempts to find a process that would bring First Nations in northern Ontario into the whole prospect of mining and forestry. As we know, currently, if a mine is found let's say just outside of Sudbury or Timmins, there is a mechanism for municipalities to levy an assessment against the property and buildings to get taxes to build roads, sewer systems etc. First Nations don't have that ability. First Nations are frozen out, such as in the case of Attawapiskat, and they are having to go out and renegotiate any type of development every time.

What this bill simply does is ask the government to negotiate an agreement with First Nations over a three-year period that would deal with revenue-sharing in whatever form that the government and the First Nations agreed to, and, if there is no agreement, that there be an arbitration process to determine the outstanding issues so that First Nations, for the first time in Ontario and probably Canada, can get their fair share when it comes to revenue from mining and forestry activities around the First Nations.

NIAGARA ESCARPMENT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PLANIFICATION ET L'AMÉNAGEMENT DE L'ESCARPEMENT DU NIAGARA

Ms Churley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to amend the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act / Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la planification et l'aménagement de l'escarpement du Niagara.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): This bill simply provides the same level of protection from urban boundary expansion as enjoyed by the Oak Ridges moraine act that was brought in by the previous Tory government. The applications for the Niagara Escarpment can be made at any time, while applications to the Oak Ridges moraine are only considered once every 10 years.

I moved this as an amendment to the greenbelt legislation in committee, but all of the Liberals voted against it. I'm now putting it forward as a private member's bill.

TRANSPARENCY IN PUBLIC MATTERS ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE DES QUESTIONS D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC

Ms Di Cocco moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 99, An Act to require open meetings for provincial and municipal boards, commissions and other public bodies / Projet de loi 99, Loi exigeant des réunions publiques pour des commissions et conseils provinciaux et municipaux ainsi que d'autres organismes publics.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): This bill requires specific provincial and municipal councils, boards and commissions and other public bodies, as prescribed, to hold meetings which are open to the public. The public can only be excluded from the meetings—

Interruption.

The Speaker: Order. Clear the gallery.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. While the gallery is being cleared, I was—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Could I ask the member from Oak Ridges to come to order? I would appreciate very much—when the gallery was being cleared, the members here were encouraging this kind of demonstration—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. This is not proper decorum for the House, and I would warn you all to refrain from doing so in the future.

Ms Di Cocco.

Ms Di Cocco: I didn't realize my bill was that controversial.

Anyway, what this bill does is that the public can only be excluded from meetings of the body if certain specific types of matters are going to be discussed by the body. Minutes of meetings open to the public have to be made available to the public in a timely fashion and must contain enough detail.

The body is also required to set rules respecting public notice of its meetings and meetings of its committees, the availability of meetings to the public and the availability of the body's rules. The body is required to appoint a person responsible for compliance, and section 8 imposes a penalty for failure to comply with the requirements. This is about the right of the public to know.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm till 9:30 pm on Thursday, June 10, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1358 to 1403.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Dombrowsky, Leona	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Duguid, Brad	Racco, Mario G.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Duncan, Dwight	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Fonseca, Peter	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Gerretsen, John	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Hoy, Pat	Sergio, Mario
Bryant, Michael	Jeffrey, Linda	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kwinter, Monte	Sorbara, Greg
Caplan, David	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marsales, Judy	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Watson, Jim
Cordiano, Joseph	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Craitor, Kim	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wong, Tony C.
Crozier, Bruce	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Delaney, Bob	Peters, Steve	Zimmer, David
Dhillon, Vic	Peterson, Tim	
Di Cocco, Caroline	Phillips, Gerry	

The Speaker: All against, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Prue, Michael
Baird, John R.	Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.
Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Tascona, Joseph N.
Chudleigh, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Wilson, Jim
Churley, Marilyn	Martel, Shelley	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dunlop, Garfield	O'Toole, John	
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 52; the nays are 19.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

LIQUOR LICENSING

PERMIS DE VENTE D'ALCOOL

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I'm honoured to introduce the Liquor Licence Amendment Act, 2004. In bringing forward this measure, our government is striking a balance between consumer choice in liquor service and stronger enforcement measures to increase public safety. This is an important first step forward in modernizing the Liquor Licence Act and bringing Ontario's liquor laws into the 21st century.

It has been 14 years since the last significant changes to Ontario's liquor licensing laws took place, and the rules and regulations have become increasingly outdated as the marketplace evolves and society changes. This bill before us today is the first step in our overall strategy to modernize the Liquor Licence Act by increasing consumer choice, strengthening enforcement tools and reducing administrative burden.

Let me tell you briefly about the two components of the bill. The first component would lay the groundwork for Bring Your Own Wine, also known as BYOW. The bill proposes a definition of "supply" to make it clear that the term "supply" includes instances where a person

brings wine into a licensed establishment for their own consumption.

Cette définition sera applicable à toutes les fois où l'expression « fournir » se trouve dans la Loi sur les permis d'alcool. S'il est adopté, cet amendement appliquera les exigences actuelles de la responsabilité sociale au service Apportez votre vin.

The Bring Your Own Wine idea is about choice. It's about a new consumer choice for liquor service. It's about choice for licensed restaurants as to whether or not they want to offer this service.

Bring Your Own Wine would allow patrons to bring commercially made bottles of wine into licensed restaurants and consume it there. Participation by licensed restaurants would be entirely voluntary. Nobody would force a business to offer this option. This service would be just what Ontario's entertainment and restaurant industries need.

Ontario's cultural diversity, especially in large cities like Toronto, Ottawa, London and Windsor, has led to a restaurant industry that is first-rate in North America. Giving licensed restaurants and consumers more choice is good for business. BYOW would also assist consumers in smaller communities, where restaurants may not have an extensive wine list.

Restaurants who choose to participate would apply to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario for a special endorsement of their liquor sales licence. Let me reiterate that if this legislation passes, this would be a voluntary program. Participating restaurants would have the option to charge a service or corkage fee, and to decide themselves the amount of that fee.

Si le projet de loi que nous proposons est adopté, le gouvernement effectuera les modifications réglementaires requises pour que les Ontariens bénéficient du service Apporter votre vin. Grâce à ces mesures, l'industrie de l'accueil ontarienne pourrait offrir une nouvelle option fort intéressante à ses clients.

If this bill is passed, the government also plans to bring another consumer choice option to Ontario. The option is called Take Home the Rest. Again, this would be about choice for the consumer and the restaurant. This initiative would allow patrons to remove an unfinished bottle of wine from a licensed restaurant as long as the licensee had properly resealed the bottle. Participation by licensed restaurants would, once again, be entirely voluntary. All of the existing rules for responsible sale, consumption and transportation would continue to reply.

Liquor law reform is about more than choice; it's also about social responsibility and public safety. Let me share with this assembly our approach for stronger enforcement, which is the second component of our Liquor Licence Act reform package.

1410

This bill contains three measures to ensure responsible use and public safety. First, we are proposing to allow the registrar of Alcohol and Gaming to immediately suspend a liquor licence in the public interest, as in situations where there is a threat to public safety. This amendment would enable the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario to take quick action to address urgent problems as they occur.

Second, we also want to create an offence for failing to leave a licensed premise when required by a police officer, or for returning the same day after being asked to leave. This would facilitate the police when they are trying to clear a premise. The Toronto Police Service recommended this change as far back as 1997, and I believe this action is long overdue.

Third, we want to double the minimum fines for offences related to liquor and underage persons to show we mean business when it comes to underage drinking. This is another step in improving social responsibility standards for beverage alcohol. The bottom line is, stronger enforcement means safer communities. Our government believes that modernization of the liquor licence system must strike a balance: It must improve consumer choice and customer service on the one hand and provide stronger and more effective enforcement tools on the other.

The package we are presenting today does this. It is the first stage of long-overdue reform, and our government is committed to further phases of Liquor Licence Act reform. Once the House has dealt with this legislation, we will begin consultations with stakeholders and the public on the next steps in bringing the liquor licence laws in this province into the 21st century, but that's down the road. The measures we're introducing today demonstrate real, positive change to modernize the regulatory system for beverage alcohol.

We only have to look at other jurisdictions for examples of success.

Depuis plus de 18 ans, les consommateurs du Québec peuvent apporter leur vin au restaurant, ce qui a eu un impact positif sur l'industrie de l'accueil de cette province.

De plus, mon homologue de l'Alberta m'a indiqué à quel point ce programme connaît du succès dans sa province.

Dans l'État de New York, certains restaurants permettent aux clients d'apporter leur vin les mardis seulement, ce qui a eu un impact positif, car cette soirée est habituellement tranquille dans l'industrie.

In the state of New York, for instance, some restaurants offer BYOW just on a slow night—a Monday or a Tuesday. As a restaurateur recently said, "What's good for the patron is good for the restaurant."

Finally, this package would make our communities safer. It would provide stronger enforcement tools and raise the bar on social responsibility.

I want to thank the many members of the hospitality sector who have contacted me, offering their support—people like Rod Seiling, a great alumni of the Toronto Maple Leafs, member of the board of the Canadian Tourism Commission and president of the Greater Toronto Hotel Association, who said, "These changes are progressive and will enable the industry to better service its diverse customer base."

Restaurateur Stephen Beckta, sommelier-owner of Beckta Dining and Wine in Ottawa, said, "I'm all for allowing customers the option to bring their own wine into our restaurant for a corkage fee. The practice allows people to dine out more often and with greater flexibility. Having worked as a sommelier and restaurant manager in New York, I know first-hand that this can be beneficial to both the guests and the restaurant alike. That is why I am a firm supporter of this initiative."

Finally, my predecessor and a former Minister of Consumer and Business Services, Mr Tim Hudak, said, "I'm in favour of bring-your-own. Let's look at the best practices. I think it's good for consumers, good for tourism. It was always my feeling as consumer minister that we have to allow tourism operators to be innovative in order to compete with other locations."

E-mails and letters to my office since this initiative was first announced support the idea of a ratio of 9 to 1. I want to thank the staff at the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services, many of whom are with us in the gallery today, for their tremendous work and their outreach to various stakeholders.

In conclusion, whether a couple is celebrating a wedding anniversary with a special bottle of wine or a customer wants to bring a fine bottle of Ontario wine to a restaurant that does not carry that particular label, consumers all around the world have experienced and embraced Bring Your Own Wine. With the Legislature's approval, so too will Ontario consumers.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I appreciate the opportunity to respond to Minister Watson's announcement. I guess this is what he considers a substantive initiative from his ministry. I have to say that this is a somewhat surprising announcement, given that the possibility of this legislation coming forward, along with a desire for early passage, has never been discussed at a House leaders' meeting.

It's sort of a typical of this grou of cheap trick artists, with seat-of-the-pants initiatives. One can only imagine that great brain trust that runs Premier McGuinty's office—now more frequently referred to as the 9% man's office—that stumblebum crew burning the midnight oil, trying to come up with ideas to distract Ontarian's attention away from their horrific budget, and the broken promises and heavy tax increases that go with it.

Just picture it: One of the bright lights says, "Let's give them bring-your-own booze. I can hear Matt Maychak saying, "That crew in the press gallery, if there's anything that will get their attention away from our disaster of a budget, it's booze or sex—or maybe booze and sex." Of course, those of us on this side of the House have much more respect for members of the gallery. We know that's not true, and this little deception will fail. It will fail primarily because Ontarians will see through this ruse, a ruse that is essentially another broken promise.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving—

Interjections.

Mr Runciman: I hope they're not laughing about Mothers Against Drunk Driving. They describe this move as "a piecemeal publicity stunt." I couldn't have said it better myself. They also describe it as "irresponsible legislation that will lead to more impaired driving." Where is the Minister of Public Safety on this? Where is the Minister of Transportation? Mothers Against Drunk Driving also say that this move ignores the recommendations of the government's own liquor task force.

I think this announcement begs the question, just who the minister consulted with, other than the mental midgets who recommended that violation of Ontario's trust called the Liberal budget. MADD wasn't consulted. Were the police consulted?

Interjection: No.

Mr Runciman: No. Were restaurants and the hospitality sector consulted?

Interjection: No.

Mr Runciman: No, of course, is the answer. Was the Minister of Tourism consulted? Where was he on this?

Interjection: No.

Mr Runciman: Of course, the answer for this Liberal Party that pretends to want consultation is that they talked to no one other than their tainted political gurus in the 9% man's office.

I want to make it clear. The Conservative Party will not allow speedy passage of this legislation. It may be politically popular, but it would be irresponsible to allow the Liberal gang that can't shoot straight to shove something like this through without opportunity for public input.

Many questions need to be answered. I'll pose just a few in the minute left to me: Why is a government in such dire shape financially prepared to lose liquor and gallonage tax? Why did the minister break his promise to make any change part of a wider liquor licensing review? What will the impact be on Ontario's already fragile hospitality industry? That's the question the Minister of Tourism should have been asking. Who will be held liable if consumers break the seals on bottles? What about the increases to liability insurance premiums? What's the view of police associations with respect to increased incidences of impaired driving? And on and on.

This is a ill-thought-out, cheap political PR stunt that will once again backfire on this inept Liberal crew, another cynical move, a political party that has raised cynicism to an art form, a Liberal Party that refuses to apologize for breaking faith with the people of Ontario, and shoves tax increases and the loss of critical medical services down their throats through closure legislation in this Legislature.

Interjection: Shameful.

Mr Runciman: Truly shameful.

1420

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On behalf of New Democrats, I want to indicate to you that it's pretty remarkable that the minister waltzes in here with this announcement, as if somehow it's a given that people should applaud and endorse this departure from the

historic role of how alcoholic beverages are served, sold and consumed in this province.

I should mention that the public response is going to be interesting. I can see that there are people out there who, at first blush, find this a rather attractive proposition. I make no bones about acknowledging that. But look at an e-mail that my colleague Michael Prue received already today. It says:

"Michael, of all the numerous problems facing the Ontario government—health care, environmental concerns, transportation—I could go on for a long time—what does Business Services Minister Jim Watson bring before the Legislature? A bill to allow customers to bring their own wine to a restaurant! Of all the lame wastes of taxpayers' money and MPPs' time! I hope you can convey this to him in some way." It's signed "Bill."

I say to Michael Prue's constituent, your message has just been conveyed. What this person is saying is the province is going to hell in a handbasket and this government's solution is to offer consumers the supposed choice of being able to bring their own wine to a restaurant.

This warrants far more thorough consideration than the government clearly has given the issue. I say to this government that there is nothing near unanimity among restaurateurs regarding this policy; in fact, I say to you that the vast majority of restaurateurs oppose this policy.

Everybody knows—it's no secret—that the profit in most restaurants is from liquor, wine and general spirit sales, that restaurants rely upon those spirit sales for their profits. When those restaurants are deprived of those profits as a result of being able to charge merely corkage fees, they are going to be forced to increase food prices. We have a restaurant industry in this province, including Niagara Falls and Toronto, that has already had to struggle with a disastrous tourist season last year, that is highly competitive and that finds itself ill-prepared to accommodate this minister's and this government's attempts to divert attention away from the crisis that this government has created around health care and around taxation of the lowest- and middle-income people in this province.

I share the concerns expressed by others with respect to shutting MADD out of the process. I spoke with MADD leadership and, indeed, their press release issued today indicates that they are very disappointed in this minister's broken promise. They participated in the broad-based consultant group around broader, longer-term liquor beverage reform in this province. They indicate that they were not given advance notice nor were they privy to the minister's directions in the drafting of today's bill. MADD very specifically states—and I agree with MADD and so do New Democrats—that if you're going to embark on this sort of change and reform, you do it not piecemeal like this government is proposing, but you do it as part of a process.

What consideration has there been of hard-working and struggling wait staff, service staff in restaurants? Government talks about a corkage fee. I put to you that 15% of a $10 corkage fee puts a lot less money in a hard-working waiter's or waitress's pocket than 15% of a $30, $40 or $50 bottle of wine. Restaurateurs are going to suffer, wait staff are going to suffer, and the general public is going to suffer because insufficient attention has been paid to the warnings expressed by MADD and other advocates for safer streets, safer highways and a reduction of injuries and personal anguish caused by drunk drivers and excessive alcohol consumption.

This, I put to you, sir, is an abdication of the role of social responsibility that Ontario has maintained through its public ownership of liquor sale and distribution outlets and through a legacy of strong control and responsible service of alcohol in this province.

New Democrats are not going to jump on this bandwagon. New Democrats expect this bill to be thoroughly debated. New Democrats expect it to go to committee. This government has left a whole lot of constituents behind once again with its knee-jerk approach to this issue.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to immediately call the order for second and third reading of Bill 94, An Act respecting public accounting, and that when the orders are called, second reading will be moved by a member of the official opposition and third reading will be moved by a member of the third party, and that the Speaker shall put the questions on second and third reading of Bill 94 immediately, without debate or amendment.

The Speaker: The Attorney General has requested unanimous consent for Bill 94. Is it agreed? Agreed.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTING ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L'EXPERTISE COMPTABLE

Mr Tascona, on behalf of Mr Bryant, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act respecting public accounting / Projet de loi 94, Loi concernant l'expertise comptable.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it. Carried.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTING ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L'EXPERTISE COMPTABLE

Mr Hampton, on behalf of Mr Bryant, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act respecting public accounting / Projet de loi 94, Loi concernant l'expertise comptable.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is for the Premier. You have broken just about every promise you made to the voters of Ontario—every major promise. You've raised taxes and now you are abandoning your promise to consult the public through a referendum that you promised Ontario voters.

Now we learn that you also want to shut out the public and get ready to ram your budget bill through the House without any traveling consultations across Ontario. If you're as proud of this budget as you say you are, why not allow the committee to travel and to hear from taxpayers in Ottawa, in Windsor, in Barrie, in Kenora and in Cornwall?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Unlike the previous two governments, yesterday we announced our intention to hold public hearings on our budget bill. We have spent twice as much time in the Legislature debating our budget plan as either the NDP or Tories allowed to debate theirs, just so we're clear about that. In power, the NDP and the Tories both rammed through their budget bills with no public hearings and no third reading debate of any kind. We will have both.

Mr Baird: I know why you're afraid to have your MPPs travel the province and hear what the taxpayers have to say about the budget. It's because they will face a tidal wave of protest and an avalanche of anger from voters who are angry with you and your government for breaking their commitment to working families in the province of Ontario. That's why.

Taxpayers are angry. They're angry in the north, they're angry in the south, and from east to west. Taxpayers are furious. They are livid. They feel betrayed by what many say is nothing short of massive electoral fraud.

1430

I say to the Minister of Finance, you have fallen below the credibility and integrity of Brian Mulroney. There isn't a single federal member of Parliament who supports his bill. This is the worst-received bill in the history of Canada.

Interjections.

Mr Baird: For the member opposite to hector—he should go out and listen to what taxpayers have to say. Will you now abandon this disgraceful attempt—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: If the member wants to stick to the issue here, I want to remind him again that they had no public hearings and no third reading debate. We are going to have both. Let me tell you something else. If they are so interested in debating this bill and having an opportunity to speak to it in an intelligent and thoughtful way, then why is it that on 15 separate occasions they have adjourned the debate with respect to this bill? They are not interested. The only conclusion I can draw is that they are not—

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr Baird: Premier, you can call six hours, not travelling outside the second floor of the Legislature, public hearings. We don't call those public hearings. We call it a sham. There is no time in your closure motion for amendments to be proposed, based on what we hear from the people of Ontario. It's a sham and it's a disgrace.

Let's look at what your time allocation says: "In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee...." So we could have a decision where the committee rejects your bill, where the committee proposes amendments successfully, and you're going to ram through your big tax increase just the way it is. Premier, will you not abandon this disgraceful attempt to shut out taxpayers in Ontario, or is their only chance to vote against your federal Liberal cousins on June 28?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member just won't take yes for an answer. We are going to have public hearings and there will be third reading debate. His anger is misplaced and he misunderstands the source of Ontarians' anger. They are angry that they had hidden the notion of a $5.6-billion deficit from them. They're also angry that they've received no apology from the previous government, and they're also angry that the members of the former cabinet are not turning over $9,000 cheques to the provincial treasury. That's what Ontarians are angry about.

The Speaker: New question; the member from Oak Ridges.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I would ask the member for Nepean-Carleton to quieten down a bit.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Speaker, I'd like a page to take these petitions over to the Premier. My question is for the Premier. Premier, the page is delivering to you more than 500 names of people, and this is a very small sampling of literally thousands, who have submitted petitions to me, to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, to the Toronto Sun. These are people from across the province who are calling on you, sir, as the Premier, to keep the law of this province. They are calling on you to have a referendum with regard to the $2.5 billion of tax increases that you promised you wouldn't give them.

Premier, you made a decision to change the budget, to change your promise, based on consulting with 237 people. There are in front of you more than 500 names. Will you undertake today to call those people personally and get their sense and to have you explain to them personally why you're not prepared to keep the law of this province?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite will know, because I made reference to this yesterday, that we are very concerned about huge numbers of people. In particular, we're concerned about the 3.3 million vaccinations we're going to be delivering to Ontario children as a result of this budget. We're concerned about the 100,000 more Ontarians, predominantly seniors, who will now receive home care and be able to stay in their homes longer. We're concerned about the 70,000 seniors who are presently shut into long-term-care centres, nursing homes, living out the rest of their lives, and we're concerned about making sure they enjoy a better quality of care. Those are the people who are uppermost in our minds. They may not be among the 200 who showed up yesterday on the front lawns of Queen's Park, but nonetheless we think they are important and we will not forget their concerns.

Mr Klees: The Premier continues to attempt to spin his way out of his impossible situation. Less than 9% of the people of this province believe him, and it's the kind of answer he's giving us now that brings him into this difficulty. He refers to immunization. Why doesn't he tell the people of the province that not one dollar of provincial money is going into that program, that it in fact is coming from the federal program? He continues to tell untruths that basically are taking the people of this province in the wrong direction.

Will the Premier please simply stand up and give a commitment to us that he will take the opportunity and listen to these people, the 500 names I have sent him, who are representative of literally hundreds of thousands? They just want you to keep the law of this land. Please, will you stand up and say you will give them a call and listen to them personally?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I am delighted and pleased to be able to make a number of very important commitments to these individuals and to all the people of Ontario. We're committed to fixing their health care, we're committed to improving the quality of public education, and we're committed to ensuring that the kind of fraud that was perpetrated by this government, by hiding a $6-billion deficit at the time of the provincial election, never, ever happens again.

Mr Klees: Well, Premier, the people of this province elected an individual who said he would uphold the law of this province, who promised he would not raise taxes. What they have now is a Premier who is not the same Dalton McGuinty whom they elected. The people of this province are demanding that at least this man keep the law. He is not doing that. The people across this province know that every time a question is asked of him in this House, he refuses to answer. He continues to give the people of this province more and more spin, no doubt as provided to him by the people in his backroom.

Dalton McGuinty, will you take the right step and be honest with the people of this province? Keep your promise. Don't be the chief lawbreaker in this province, sir. You have a responsibility to keep the law. Have the referendum. Will you commit today to keep your word to the people of this province?

Hon Mr McGuinty: One of the very first things we did was that we were honest with the people of Ontario when it came to the state of the government accounts. The previous government was ashamed of the state of our finances. We made that information public and we've made some difficult decisions to address the mess that was left to us by the previous government. That is the kind of approach we will bring throughout our mandate in dealing with the people of Ontario. We will be straightforward and upfront about our decisions, why we're making them and the state of the mess that the previous government left to us.

TAXATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. New Democrats have shown you for many days now just how unfair and regressive your new taxes are for middle- and modest-income working families, and today I want to give you another example.

Under the Harris Conservatives, an individual with an income of $100,000 a year got a 35% tax reduction. He also got an 18% tax reduction from someone named Paul Martin in the federal budget. Combining those two reductions, that individual with an income of $100,000 a year got a tax cut of $9,600 a year. With your budget, a single mom with a taxable income of $23,000 a year will see her provincial income tax increase by 24%. Meanwhile, that individual with a taxable income of $100,000 a year who got a combined $9,600 tax reduction from Mike Harris and Paul Martin will see his income taxes go up by only 7%. Is that fair, Mr Premier?

1440

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the opportunity to speak once again about our health care premium and how progressive it is. Here's some information that I am sure the member opposite will want to relay to concerned citizens and in particular to his constituents: 43% of Ontario tax filers will pay nothing; 48% of Ontario seniors, nearly half of all Ontario seniors, will pay nothing.

I want to contrast that with the NDP's first budget. Under their first budget, if you were making $20,000, your taxes went up by $160. In the course of their mandate, tuition fees went up 50% and gas taxes went up 30%. Again, under this budget, our health care premium, 48% of Ontario seniors pay nothing and 43% of all Ontario tax filers pay nothing.

Mr Hampton: Part of the difference is that New Democrats didn't go around the province promising people they wouldn't raise their taxes.

Premier, I have another example for you. An individual with a taxable income—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order, Minister of Finance.

Leader of the third party.

Interjections.

Mr Hampton: Speaker, can you do something to restrain the Minister of Finance, please?

An individual with a taxable income of $125,000 a year got a 30% tax cut from Mike Harris and a 16% tax cut from Paul Martin. That's a combined tax reduction of $11,500 a year from the Martin Liberals and the Harris Conservatives.

Now, under your budget and your regressive and unfair taxes, a husband and wife together, who each have taxable incomes of $50,000 a year, will have to pay $1,200 of your new regressive taxes while that individual with a $125,000-a-year income, who got an $11,500 tax reduction, will pay only $750 more. I say again, does that seem fair to you, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, somebody earning $20,000 or less under this budget will pay nothing by way of a health care premium. Under the NDP budget, if you were earning $20,000 you had to pay another $160 in taxes. Under this budget, 48% of Ontario seniors will pay nothing by way of a health care premium. Not only that, but many will qualify for an increase in the Ontario property tax credit of $125. Again, 43% of all Ontario tax filers will pay nothing.

Student tuition went up by 50%; we have frozen it. Gas taxes went up by 30%; we are taking some of the existing gas tax and giving it to our cities for public transit. That is the stark contrast between the NDP government and this Liberal government.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr Hampton: Speaker, I don't think the Premier wants to answer the question, so I'll give him another example.

Under Mike Harris's budget, somebody with an income of $250,000 a year got a 25% tax reduction from Mr Harris and a 13% tax reduction from Paul Martin. They got a combined $20,000-a-year tax reduction from Mr Martin and Mr Harris.

Under your budget, that individual with a taxable income of a quarter of a million dollars a year, who got a $20,000-a-year tax reduction from Mike Harris and Paul Martin, will pay only $900 of your new tax. But again, that husband and wife, who are working very hard and each has a taxable income of $50,000 a year, will pay $1,200 a year. I say again, Premier, does this sound fair to you?

Hon Mr McGuinty: It's interesting for my friend to pursue this line of questioning. Over here, we're asking ourselves why he defended his friends, the corporations, when we were trying to roll back corporate tax cuts. Why did he defend his friends, the wealthy parents, who were sending their kids to private schools when we voted to eliminate the private school tax credit? It's very difficult to determine from day to day on which side of the fence our friend here happens to find himself.

Again, some very good news for 48% of Ontario seniors, who will be paying nothing with respect to this new health premium, and 43% of all Ontario tax filers, who will pay nothing under our new premium.

The Speaker: New question?

Mr Hampton: It seems the Premier wants to continue to avoid answering the question, so I'll give him another example. An individual with a taxable income of $150,000 got a 28% tax reduction from Mike Harris and a 15% tax reduction from your friend Paul Martin. That's a combined tax reduction of $13,150 a year. That person is only going to pay $750 additional under your very regressive tax changes in this budget. Meanwhile, that hard-working husband and wife who each have taxable incomes of $50,000 a year will pay $1,200.

I simply ask you again: Does that seem fair to you? It doesn't seem fair to me. In fact, it seems so unfair that you should withdraw your budget and bring back figures that allow for a more even, a more balanced, a more fair spread.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the Minister of Finance is anxious to speak to this.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): The actual truth of the tax system in Ontario makes us the most competitive jurisdiction, in terms of personal income taxes, for those earning $55,000 or less in Ontario. The average tax rate for people in Ontario who earn about $200,000 a year is about 40%. So 40% of their income comes back in taxes. Because we have a good, strong, progressive rate, those who earn, say, $16,000 pay only about 9% of their income in tax. By way of creating a premium that is geared to income, we keep the progressiveness of our tax system.

But I can understand the pain the leader of the third party is going through. It was back in 1991, I believe, that his friend the Treasurer at that time—Floyd Laughren's first budget—introduced a budget that sent this province into an economic tailspin that took us some 12 years or more to recover from. So I take no lectures on economics or policy or tax from that member.

Mr Hampton: The Premier wouldn't answer the question, and it now seems the Minister of Finance won't answer the question. In fact, the answer I got was very much like the answers the Conservatives used to give. As they continued to cut taxes on the well-off, they said, "Well, we want to be competitive with George Bush. We want to get taxes on the well-off right down where they are with George Bush." Your budget is even more regressive than the budgets we used to see under the Conservatives.

I ask you again, does it seem fair to you that an individual with a taxable income of $100,000 a year, who got a tax break of between $10,000 a year and $20,000 a year from Paul Martin and Mike Harris, is only going to pay $750 more under your new budget and your new regressive taxes, while that single-parent mom, with a taxable income of $22,000 a year, sees her income tax go up by 24%?

Hon Mr Sorbara: The problem my friend has is that he has absolutely no credibility on these matters. When we were sworn in on October 23, we inherited a province

that had an entrenched debt and a debt spiral that was only matched by what his party brought the province into back in 1991.

1450

But I want to tell my friend, if he were honest with the people of Ontario, he would explain to them why back in November, when we brought forward a bill to raise corporate income tax rates so that we had the money for public services, he voted against it. He should explain to the people of Ontario why, when we brought in a bill to eliminate the private school tax credit brought in by the Conservatives, he voted against that measure. Why is it, when we brought forward a bill to eliminate a very luxurious tax credit for the most wealthy seniors in this province, he voted against that? Once he explains that, his credibility in this House might improve just a little bit.

Mr Hampton: I feel almost mortally wounded getting a lecture from a Minister of Finance whose budget only 11% of the people of Ontario think is on the right track, and from a Premier who only 9% of the people of Ontario think is doing a good job. The 11% Minister of Finance and the 9% Premier: All your attempts to evade the question aren't going to work.

The reality of your budget is this: Banks and insurance companies, who have huge profits, are getting a $1-billion tax reduction when your budget is fully implemented. Those who are very well off—and I give the example again: Somebody who has an income of $125,000 a year, who's getting a combined tax reduction from Paul Martin and Mike Harris of close to $15,000 a year—you're hardly going after them at all. But hard-working modest- and middle-income families are seeing their provincial income taxes go up by 16%, 24%. How do you justify this? When are you going to withdraw your budget and bring in some progressive tax changes?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I'm surprised that this member thinks that he should have the luxury of such gross distortions in his questions; I really am.

In the first year of our budget there will be a $990,000 reduction in capital tax amongst corporations. By comparison, as a result of the by-election, my friends in the NDP will get a $1.8-million increase to their research staff, to provide, amongst other things, a driver for the leader of the NDP.

I say to my friend on the other side: They only have one enemy. Just to speak to the examples that he raises, an individual in Ontario who earns $30,000 a year has an average tax rate of 15%. An individual who earns $100,000 in our province has an average tax rate of almost double: $30,000. That's as it should be, and that's the way it stays with the Ontario health premium.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is to the Premier. On May 10 and again on June 3, I raised the issue of your government's offensive hard cap on Cancer Care Ontario's new drug funding program. I personally came to you in the House and gave you proof and evidence of the fact that your government, in a memo to Cancer Care Ontario, had instructed them to stop reimbursing zoledronic acid treatments for prostate cancer which has metastasized into the bone.

Since January 28, according to the Canadian Cancer Society, we have had over 3,000 new cases of prostate cancer diagnosed. Today, I bring to the House the case of a woman in her 30s living in the GTA who is battling metastatic breast cancer. Her husband's drug plan has reached its cap and she is now mortgaging her home in order that she can have this life-palliating drug and take the remaining years of her life with her children.

Premier, how can you go on television, look into the camera, and tell Ontarians that you personally guarantee that every cent of new money going into health care will go to pay for, among other things, new cancer treatments when your hard cap, imposed by your government for the first time since Cancer Care Ontario had begun, has removed life-palliating and life-saving drugs from Ontario residents?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Let me first, in reference to the specific case raised by the member opposite, offer my very best wishes to the individual involved.

Let me say that my understanding is that—and this is basic information I got from the Minister of Health—Cancer Care Ontario is an independent agency that manages the cancer system. They also manage the drugs which they decide are going to form part of their particular formulary. We don't do that through the cabinet. Currently, physicians can apply, through what is known as a section 8 application, for access to particular drugs, and this process remain very much alive.

Mr Jackson: Premier, you've been misinformed by your own ministry. First of all, Cancer Care Ontario put this drug on the list of eligible drugs. It was on there for 28 days, and then your ministry and your minister intervened and said, "You know what? You're going to go $4 million to $6 million over on your budget, and we won't pay it. Therefore, start pulling back drugs." That is what is happening, Premier, and you've been misinformed by your minister.

I want to bring another drug to your attention that has been caught in this web: Rituximab, which significantly prolongs progression-free survival of cancer patients with advanced non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. This drug saves lives. This is not a palliating drug. In Ontario, you have to be 60 years of age or older in order to get this drug. In BC and in some other provinces, it's eligible for all patients in that province. I have names of people who are now going to Buffalo in order to pay for this private treatment, when if they were in British Columbia, they would get the treatment as a matter of fact.

Premier, you have increased taxes in order to pay for more health care. You're on television telling them that you're going to increase cancer treatment. My question to you simply is this: Will you not stand in your place, as I have asked you on two previous occasions, and tell

Cancer Care Ontario and the thousands of cancer patients in this province that you will not put a hard cap on the new drug funding program so we can give hope to cancer patients in this province and not send them to either the United States or to other provinces to get this treatment? Will you stand in your House today and guarantee that you will cover these new drugs in our province?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, Cancer Care Ontario is an independent agency and manages the cancer system, including the drugs. We are investing another $60.7 million for drugs, and that includes—

Mr Jackson: That's less than we spent last year.

Hon Mr McGuinty: —my friend may want to listen to this—$4 million for new drugs this year in connection with Cancer Care Ontario's budget.

CHILDREN'S IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Premier. Premier, yesterday your Minister of Health said that your new unfair health tax is paying for your immunization program, and then, yesterday afternoon, the Minister of Health was forced to admit that in fact it's the federal government and not your health tax that's paying for immunizations in Ontario.

In the federal budget, $400 million over three years was allocated to Ontario for immunizations. Ontario's share is $156 million. That is the very same amount of money that the Minister of Health yesterday announced for the program. Premier, why is it that you are telling people that immunizations are going to be paid through your new health tax when in fact it's the federal government paying for the whole program?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I am very, very pleased to report that as a result of our extensive lobbying efforts to the federal government, we're receiving $156 million. That's point number one.

Point number two: That is not permanent and fixed funding. We're going to cover the full cost when that funding runs out.

Point number three: We will not be putting that money into corporate tax cuts; we'll be putting that into vaccinations for Ontario children.

Ms Martel: Premier, let me remind you what your health minister said on behalf of your government. He said yesterday that the vaccination program "is a very good example of what a health premium does to provide premium health care in the province of Ontario." Then he was forced to acknowledge that the province is getting federal dollars for the immunization strategy and dedicating all of it to the program. Not one single cent of your premium is going to pay for the immunization program.

I know that you are desperate to try and defend your unfair, regressive new health tax, but don't you think it's time to tell people the truth? Not one cent of the premium dollar is going to pay for vaccinations; the federal government is paying for all of it. Why are you telling people that, and where is the $156 million going?

Hon Mr McGuinty: What has the member opposite got against vaccinations for children? We think this is a good program. We think it's a great program. Over the course of three years, we are going to deliver 3.3 million vaccinations for Ontario children, covering chicken pox, pneumococcal disease and meningitis. We think that's an important, progressive step made on behalf of our children and in the interest of public health in Ontario.

1500

LIQUOR LICENSING

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): My question is for my friend the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. I'm asking a question of clarification today on the new legislation you've introduced that, if passed, would permit Ontarians to bring their own bottles of wine to restaurants.

This proposal is very popular with the dining public, but some restaurant owners are concerned about what it's going to mean to them. We all know that restaurants operate on a slim profit margin. Many of them rely on wine sales to stay in the black. These restaurant owners and their staff are concerned that allowing consumers to bring their own wine might devastate their businesses. What assurances can you give restaurant owners and their staff that bring-your-own-wine initiatives will not impair their businesses or cause job losses in the industry?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I want to thank the honourable member for Don Valley West. This piece of legislation that I introduced today is very much permissive in nature. It allows a restaurant that has a liquor licence in Ontario to opt into the BYOW program. If a restaurant doesn't want a BYOW endorsement on their licence, it doesn't have to have it.

Let me read you a couple of quotes from some people in the industry.

"It's a great idea. Why not? It's freedom," said Michael Stadtländer, a chef in Collingwood.

"In Quebec, for years patrons have brought their own wine to restaurants, and Alberta has become the first province to let folks bring in their own bottles even in the licensed eateries. No riots, no restaurant closings, no mass social responsibility. Isn't it time we too rejoined civilization?" according to wine critic Gord Stimmell.

Finally, let me quote Tim Hudak, who is much more progressive and enlightened than the member from Leeds-Grenville, who was frothing at the mouth when he was speaking on this issue. Mr Hudak is much more progressive. He said, "I'm in favour of bring-your-own-wine. Let's look at the best practices. I think it's good for consumers, good for tourism. It was always my feeling as consumer minister that we have to allow tourism operators to be innovative in order to compete with other locations."

Ms Wynne: Thank you, Minister. I'm really happy to hear that there are restaurateurs, and Mr Tim Hudak, who are very happy about this initiative. It will allow consumers to bring their favourite wines, some of which may not be on the restaurant's wine list. It might save them some money, in which case they might buy a more expensive meal.

Some patrons, though, when they order a bottle of wine to go with their meal, feel obligated to drink more than they normally would, because they don't want to see the wine go to waste. I understand there's a take-home-the-rest policy that is part of your legislation. How will this work in practice?

Hon Mr Watson: The take-home-the-rest policy, which is also in effect in places like British Columbia and Alberta, allows an individual who perhaps has bought a bottle of wine or brought a bottle of wine in—if they don't feel it appropriate to finish the bottle, the restaurant will have the ability to cork the bottle flush with the top and allow people to remove it.

I received a note today from MADD Canada, who were saying, "We are not opposed to patrons of restaurants corking an unfinished bottle and taking it home with them."

We are having discussions with the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving, because these individuals realize that if we allow people to bring home the rest, it is much more socially responsible. Again, it's a voluntary concept on the part of the restaurateur. We think this will bring legislation into the 21st century.

On a final note, we're also listening to the Toronto police force, which the previous government ignored. In 1997, they came forward and said they wanted the authority for a police officer to ensure that someone can be charged when they refuse to leave a licensed establishment. They talk law and order—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. New question.

COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT FUND

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is for the Minister of Finance. You've put municipalities on notice that your government is planning to renege on a promise to pay for 2003 policing costs through the community reinvestment fund. The Town of the Blue Mountains is just one municipality that is going to have to raise its property taxes 24% because you refuse to pay legitimate bills for expenses incurred by municipalities last year and you're not committing any money to this year. Your government promised this money to municipalities. Towns and cities everywhere went through their budget process and, in good faith, they set their tax levies for this year, and they included in that process some expectation of provincial government assistance.

You're reneging on a deal. If a private company reneged on a deal like this, someone would either have to pay a heavy penalty or someone would be sent off to jail. So I ask you, Minister, how can you in good conscience not pay your bills from last year and leave municipalities like the Town of the Blue Mountains in the lurch with a 24% tax increase?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): If I could just go back for a moment to the extensive consultations that we had before the budget, one of the themes that came through loud and clear in the 14 consultations that I conducted personally, whether it was with big cities or the very smallest and most remote municipalities, is this: that the financing of municipalities that we inherited after eight and a half years of downloading from the province—in the city of Toronto, they were unable to pay their bills, and that's the one we all hear about on the front pages. But small, rural municipalities say, "We don't have enough money to repair the bridges."

One of the things I'm most proud of in the budget is that we have begun to repair the process of financing of our municipalities: large and small, north and south, east and west. We are, for example, going to upload to the province 75% of the cost of public health. In the city of Toronto, we are investing significantly in public transit—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Sir, but for your interjection, I could go on.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Wilson: Minister, you're hanging municipalities out to dry. You seem to have lots of money for your pet projects. You're making announcements almost every day of millions of dollars of new money, but you refuse to pay your bills from last year. The Town of the Blue Mountains and most of rural and northern Ontario aren't going to see a cent from your gas tax promise. You even admit in your own budget that the majority of new money for public health to municipalities will largely go to the GTA. You're not doing anything to help rural and northern towns and cities.

I tell you again, if you don't live up to paying your bills from last year, the ratepayers of the Town of the Blue Mountains are going to see—and this is from the treasurer and the mayor themselves—a 24% tax hike because of you.

At the very least, before you make another spending announcement in this province, could you pay your bills from last year and save the property taxpayers in rural and northern Ontario this huge grief? Stop reneging on your promises, show some backbone, put some honour back in this place and pay your bills.

Hon Mr Sorbara: He does some of his work here, but he's headed for Stratford. That guy has an acting career. He doesn't have a political career, but he does have an acting career.

I'll be very brief. The Town of the Blue Mountains will receive this year $1.683 million from the community reinvestment fund.

Beyond that, just to speak for a moment to the rhetoric, virtually every single municipality in this province said, "Thank God for the new themes in municipal refinancing that were contained in the budget."

He mentioned northern Ontario. For the first time in 10 years, a provincial budget has talked about financing a program to bring prosperity and hope and economic development and high-quality community services to the north. That he should refer to the north and say that we're not doing anything makes his question absolutely without credibility.

1510

AUTISM SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Attorney General. Your government was in court again yesterday, this time at the Supreme Court of Canada. I was there and I listened in dismay and then anger as your government once again aggressively fought autistic children and their families. You were there supporting the Gordon Campbell government of British Columbia, a government that has refused to pay for IBI treatment for its autistic children, despite the lower court's ordering it to do so.

Minister, you were at the Supreme Court yesterday. You're still in court here in Ontario, fighting the families involved in the Wynberg and Deskin court cases. You are now fighting 80 other families who have gone to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. When is your government going to stop fighting autistic kids and their families and do what you promised to do: fund IBI for all those autistic children who need it?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): The government of Ontario was intervening before the Supreme Court of Canada on the issue of whether or not the government—in this case, of Ontario—should be able to design the best program possible to treat autistic kids, instead of having this being addressed by interlocutory injunction, application or other order in the courts.

We are fighting for the ability of this Legislature to determine the government's ability to provide a better program and better treatment for autistic kids in Ontario. That's what we are fighting for. Are the courts going to decide that or are the elected representatives of the people of Ontario going to decide that? That's what we're intervening over.

Ms Martel: The BC government refuses to fund IBI treatment despite lower court rulings, and you were there in support.

But let me remind you of the very specific promises your own Premier made to autistic children. He said during the election campaign on September 17, "I also believe that the lack of government-funded IBI treatment for autistic children over six is unfair and discriminatory. The Ontario Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six."

After the election, however, you have refused to end the discrimination against children over the age of six. You are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting families in an Ontario court. You are spending thousands and thousands of dollars fighting other families at the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. Minister, you have fought these families and these kids just as aggressively as the Conservatives before you, and that is wrong.

When are you going to live up to your own election promise and fund IBI for autistic kids for as long as is medically necessary? When are you going to do that?

Hon Mr Bryant: Just to be clear here, the member said the government of Ontario was in there supporting another provincial program. We were in there trying to fight for Ontario's program.

Here's what we're fighting for. We're fighting for the provincial ability to do this: support children with autism from their early years right through to their school years. We're fighting to permit the province to do that, committing an additional $40 million in funding per year to assist these children. We're fighting for the ability to do that in this Legislature, as opposed to having it designed in the court. We're fighting for the ability to have a comprehensive plan that doubles our spending to serve children diagnosed with autism across the province.

I've got to tell you, it is our view that through an interlocutory motion, the court is just unable to provide the kind of comprehensive program that will best serve the needs of autistic kids. That's what we are fighting for in the courts, and I will make no apology for that.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): My question is for the Honourable Chris Bentley, the Minister of Labour. Many of my constituents in Etobicoke North are new to this country and perhaps not fully aware of the rights and privileges they are guaranteed under law. Some employers, unfortunately, are taking advantage of this by withholding pay and engaging in a number of questionable practices.

I understand you've made an announcement about a new employment standards initiative. I ask, would you be able to inform this House and the people of Ontario about this announcement, and especially how it will protect vulnerable workers and make it easier for employers to comply with the Employment Standards Act?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): I'd like to thank the member for Etobicoke North for his question, and for his concern and advice he's been giving me in my position as minister about the concerns of vulnerable workers.

We have indicated quite clearly as a government that we are determined to make sure the most vulnerable in our society are protected and have all their rights under the Employment Standards Act protected. We announced a threefold initiative. We introduced the 60-hours legislation, which will protect a worker's right to choose whether to work more than 48 hours in a week. We also announced as companion announcements an awareness initiative and an enforcement initiative. It became clear that we needed to do something to make sure we have the best-practice advice from people who work with vulner-

able workers. So just today, I announced the Minister's Employment Standards Action Group. It will be chaired by my parliamentary assistant, the member from Oakville, Mr Flynn. It will bring together workers from labour and business organizations to advise us how to best protect the vulnerable in our society.

Mr Qaadri: Thank you, Minister. With your remarks, I'm sure my constituents will welcome the news of this particular action group. For the record, I'm pleased that our initiatives regarding immigrants and new Canadians are not to be found under the Criminal Code section, unlike with the previous regime.

The hard-working people of Rexdale, Jamestown and Thistletown are hungry for justice, and they deserve nothing less. Minister, what other initiatives is your ministry undertaking to reverse the effects of the previous government's negligence and to ensure that Ontario's employers fully understand and comply with their responsibilities under the Employment Standards Act?

Hon Mr Bentley: I'm looking forward to the advice that's going to be given to this government by the Minister's Employment Standards Action Group, but in the meantime we've undertaken a number of initiatives. First of all, we have to make workers, particularly vulnerable workers, more aware of their rights under employment standards and other pieces of legislation. So we are taking an initiative which will make easy-to-use, easily accessible information available, not simply in English or French but in languages that may be found in the GTA in particular, and the province of Ontario, among many new arrivals in Canada.

The important aspect is that we take the complicated, put it in a form that people can easily use and access, make workers more aware of their rights, and then they will know how to access some protection in the event that their rights may be violated. That's extremely important for the protection of the workers in this province.

CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT OF POLICE

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Attorney General. Minister, this morning you made an announcement in the media studio. From this announcement, we know that you're reviewing the police complaints system. What we really don't know, Minister, is exactly why you've ordered this review, exactly how it will be conducted and actually who requested you to do the review. Did you make this announcement this morning to take attention away from Dalton McGuinty and his plan to slam the door on the budget debate with time allocation?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): We did provide an update to a process that's been underway for some time. We have been saying for years now that it is important for police to receive the respect and confidence from the public that they deserve. We believe we need to have a civilian oversight system that is independent and transparent.

We have consulted with everybody imaginable so far, and asked for more advice in terms of who else we should be meeting with. Now begins the consultation, facilitation, analysis and decision-making part of this process. I have asked the former Chief Justice of the Superior Court, the Honourable Patrick LeSage, to do this, and he has agreed. It is an opportunity for somebody who is unquestionably and irrevocably neutral to put his mind to this issue. I know that he has the respect of many Ontarians, and we look forward to getting his advice.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you, Minister. The announcement this morning was hastily thrown together and you didn't identify any specific criteria that the Honourable Patrick LeSage is expected to follow in his review, although you have mentioned a couple now. In fact, based on the press conference, you were asking him to go into select communities for his review without identifying those communities, instead of a more open and inclusive review process. Is this exercise just another way for your government to show its true colours, its lack of confidence in the men and women who put their lives on the line every day: Ontario's police officers?

1520

Hon Mr Bryant: I have enormous confidence in the Honourable Patrick LeSage and that he will conduct himself and these consultations in a way that everybody has confidence in. I really believe that he is going to do this in a way that everybody can have confidence in, and that there will be a wide mixture of different types of consultations. He has said that he will travel the province. He will make sure that we look not just at the urban context, but that we look at what the contexts are outside of Toronto, Ottawa, London etc.

I have enormous confidence in Patrick LeSage. And you're right. I haven't said to former Chief Justice LeSage, "Here are the limitations on your review." I've said, "Please consult and please advise on this very important issue so that we can ensure that the public has confidence in a civilian oversight system, and that the police have the respect and confidence that they deserve."

MINISTRY INTERVENTION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Attorney General. I thought your government supported rights for same-sex couples, but I guess I was wrong. I was shocked to learn of your last minute intervention in the Hislop case. You are opposing this man's right to get the CPP survivor benefits his partner paid for through his pension contributions. You are saying the trial judge was wrong to grant him those benefits. The judge ruled it is discrimination not to pay retroactive survivor benefits dating back to 1985 when gays and lesbians were included in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Why are you joining the federal Liberals in opposing same-sex survivor benefits to people like George Hislop?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for

democratic renewal): I'm really happy to let the member know what is going on. The government of the province of Ontario is intervening on this case. There are two issues. There is a rights issue that you're speaking of and an equality issue that you're speaking of. We are not speaking to that issue at all. We are not disputing that issue at all.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Bryant: No we aren't. We are intervening on the issue of constitutional remedies and whether or not they can be retroactive or proactive. All of the leading case law suggests that when constitutional rulings come down, they are prospective. If they are retrospective and the government, on any issue, has to go back and make payments retrospectively for something unconstitutional, it has enormous implications on a wide variety of ministries for a wide variety of issues. There has never been, on a rights-based issue of this magnitude, a retroactive order.

It is only on that general legal principle that we are intervening. It is not on the rights-based issue, it is not on the equality issue, and I am happy to let the member know that.

Ms Churley: That is legal mumbo-jumbo. This is about rights and about people who paid their own money into the pension plan. This is their money. I want to know, do you know George Hislop? He is a man in his 70s who uses a walker. He has contributed to his community as one of Toronto's first gay activists and the first openly gay person to seek office. He is a hero to many. His partner paid into the Canada pension plan. It's his money. The federal Liberals, your federal cousins, are saying he shouldn't get survivor benefits. I'm asking you again, why are you joining your federal Liberal cousins to try to deny George Hislop a survivor pension?

Hon Mr Bryant: The Ministry of the Attorney General, when we make interventions on general legal principles, we intervene based on those principles that are before us. We look at whether or not we want to intervene on a particular part of a judgment. And I just want to say again for the member so she understands it: We are taking no position, we are not intervening and we are not speaking to the issue of equality rights or the charter rights. I can tell you that we are intervening with respect to constitutional remedies, broadly speaking.

That is the independent judgment that this ministry has made. We are trying to ensure that the court is giving attention to an issue that has extremely broad implications, retroactive versus prospective remedies. I say again, we are not intervening on the equality and rights issue, period.

FORMATION D'APPRENTISSAGE
APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Ma question s'adresse à la ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités.

Minister, on behalf of trades people in Ontario, and more specifically in the beautiful riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, I can tell you today that the number of spaces available in our eastern Ontario colleges for apprenticeship programs has not met demand. Many people in my riding who would like to participate in a plumbing apprenticeship program have been unable to do so because the demand for in-class training is greater than the number of spaces available. Has any progress been made toward increasing the number of in-class spaces available in eastern Ontario for plumbing apprenticeship programs?

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): Yes, we are indeed committed to increasing apprenticeships for the people of Ontario. In fact, our target is 26,000 annually by 2007-08.

At present, Algonquin College provides programs for the plumber apprenticeship training. We have also recently increased the number of training agents for delivering those programs in eastern Ontario. Starting this fall, La Cité collégiale will also be providing those programs, which will also serve the francophone community well.

Mr Lalonde: I have recently been approached by Plomberie Séguin Plumbing of Embrun and other enterprises regarding the ratio of certified plumbers and electricians to apprentices allowed on construction sites. I understand that in both trades, the current ratio is one apprentice to one journeyperson for the first two apprentices, and one apprentice to three journeypersons for each apprentice after that.

We must ensure that the ratio does not lead to an unnecessary barrier to potential apprentices in these trades, which could lead to a future shortage of plumbers and electricians in eastern Ontario. What is the government's role in relation to journeyperson-apprentice ratios in Ontario?

Hon Mrs Chambers: We are committed to a number of things. One is accessibility to the trades, and two, the safety and quality of the work done with our apprentices. I am indeed waiting for proposals—and I expect that they will be with me shortly—from the provincial advisory councils for the plumbing and electrician trades.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the taxpayer protection law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11, 2003, not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised in TV ads not to raise taxes by one penny on working families; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty pledged in writing to obey the taxpayer protection law, which requires a referendum before increasing taxes;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all of the McGuinty government's tax increases are put before the people of Ontario in a referendum."

I affix my signature to this petition, as I totally agree with it.

1530

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"To: Legislative Assembly of Ontario

"Re: Support for chiropractic services in Ontario health insurance plan

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I am in agreement with it and affix my signature thereto.

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): On behalf of the constituents of Etobicoke Centre:

"Re: Support for chiropractic services in Ontario health insurance plan

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

RECREATIONAL TRAILERS

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many owners of seasonal trailers kept at campgrounds have raised their concerns over the impact on property taxes on seasonal trailers and the unfairness of imposing a new tax on persons who use minimum municipal services;

"Whereas this new tax will discourage businesses and tourism opportunities in Ontario and will cause many families to give up their vacation trailers all together;

"Whereas the administration of this tax will require a substantial investment in staff time and resources across the province of Ontario;

"Whereas some representatives of the recreational vehicle industry, campground providers and trailer owners have suggested an alternative sticker or tag system to establish fees for seasonal trailers;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Parliament of Ontario immediately abandon the assessment of taxation of recreational trailers used on a seasonal basis in 2004, and that the government of Ontario consult with all stakeholders regarding the development of a fair and reasonable sticker or tag fee that would apply to recreational trailers used on a seasonal basis."

I affix my name in full support.

TRANSITION BENEFITS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"Yes, Peter Kormos, I agree with you. The Liberal government must enforce our rights for transition benefits.

"Whereas HOOPP is presently funding retirement benefits for those who have less than 20 years of service and are 55 years of age or older;

"Whereas HOOPP is proposing to eliminate the availability of these transition benefits beyond 2005;

"Whereas we, the undersigned, will have in excess of 30 years of service and will not be entitled to these benefits because we have not reached the age of 55;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enforce our rights to

receive these transitional funds extended until December 31, 2008."

I've signed it as well.

TAXATION

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a number of petitions forwarded by Anna and Vince Thow of Brampton that read as follows:

"Petition to force Premier McGuinty to obey the taxpayer protection law.

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the taxpayer protection law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11, 2003, not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised in TV ads not to raise taxes by one penny on working families; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty pledged in writing to obey the taxpayer protection law, which requires a referendum before increasing taxes;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all of the McGuinty government's tax increases are put before the people of Ontario in a referendum."

I will add my name to this petition.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition that I received from the office of Dr Gary Bovine in Welland. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Re: Support for chiropractic services in Ontario health insurance plan:

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

Signed by thousands, including myself.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I have a petition to present on behalf of Dr Wysorski, as well as her patients Niki Cooper and many others.

"To: Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Re: Support for chiropractic services in Ontario health insurance plan:

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province"—indeed, Canada.

I'm pleased to sign this and endorse it on behalf of my constituents in Ontario.

TAXATION

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"We, the undersigned, request that an immediate stop be put on the new health tax. This tax will cause undue hardship on many working Ontario residents."

Signed by thousands, including myself.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I have a petition here today to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and Samuel is here to collect it from me.

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the taxpayer protection law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11, 2003, not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised in TV ads not to raise taxes by one penny on working families; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty pledged in writing to obey the taxpayer protection law, which requires a referendum before increasing taxes;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all of the McGuinty government's tax increases are put before the people of Ontario in a referendum."

I'm pleased to include my name on this petition.

PENSION PLANS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stelpipe Ltd and Welland Pipe Ltd are currently operating under the protection of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA), as part of the restructuring process being undertaken by Stelco Inc; and

"Whereas there is a significant unfunded liability in the Stelpipe and Welland Pipe pension plans for hourly employees; and

"Whereas there will be a significant negative impact on the pensions of both active employees and retirees in the event of a windup of these pension plans; and

"Whereas the pension benefits guarantee fund (PBGF) does not protect the entire amount of accrued pension benefits; and

"Whereas the PBGF may not have sufficient assets to provide such protection;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) to amend the provisions of the PBGF in order that it provides complete coverage and protection for the accrued pension benefits of all pension plan members;

"(2) to amend the financing provisions for the PBGF in order to ensure that sufficient funds are available to provide for the complete protection of all accrued pension benefits;

"(3) to take interim action as required in order to provide immediate protection of the accrued pension benefits of both active employees and retirees of Stelpipe and Welland Pipe."

It's signed by thousands, and I've affixed my signature as well.

1540

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): The last in a series of petitions signed by over 600 people in Oakville.

"Whereas the current method of allocating municipal tax revenues to the taxpayer by property tax based on current market value assessment has the following unwanted characteristics:

"(1) The tax burden varies subject to the desirability of a location, making taxes unpredictable and difficult to budget for;

"(2) The relative market value of a property is subjective and variable and subject to disagreement;

"(3) Long-time residents on fixed incomes in particular are affected, causing hardship, but this problem also affects young families;

"(4) Neighbourhood instability is increased as house sales are accelerated beyond the normal rate of neighbourhood renewal;

"(5) Residents who have done no home improvements pay increased taxes because of new higher-cost development in a neighbourhood, out of their control, and perceive this as unfair;

"(6) Widely different property taxes caused by market value pay for equivalent services for each resident, without any apparent conscious policy social good and regardless of ability to pay...;

"(7) Long-standing policy exempts the sale of a principal residence from capital gains tax, yet current value assessment effectively contradicts this, causing a prepaid capital gains penalty based on a latent value which may never be realized;

"(8) Resentment in one part of a community that it is paying more than its fair share can lead to division and other socially undesirable effects; and

"Whereas these undesirable effects, which are sufficient reason on their own for our petition, are exacerbated by the increased reliance on the property tax to fund a greater range of government programs as instituted by the former government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"To change the method of property assessment so that it becomes based on objective criteria, using a formula such as lot size in conjunction with building total exterior dimensions, and removes the location and desirability factor from the calculation."

It's a petition I agree with and I've affixed my signature thereto.

TRAFFIC SIGNALS

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation promised in June 2003 that the residents of Green Briar would get traffic signals installed at the intersection of the 10th side road and Highway 89 in the town of New Tecumseth; and

"Whereas traffic can be lined up 15 to 20 cars deep while motorists are waiting to turn on to Highway 89 at peak traffic; and

"Whereas the increased traffic on Highway 89 has made it extremely difficult and hazardous to enter or exit at this location;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The residents of Green Briar and the people of New Tecumseth request the immediate support of the government of Ontario to improve safety along Highway 89, and, in so doing, we request that the Ministry of Transportation immediately begin working to construct traffic signals at the entrance to Green Briar to improve safety and prevent a serious accident from happening along Highway 89."

I agree with that. I note that almost all of the several hundred residents of Green Briar—I'd have to count them all, but if somebody went door to door, address to address, almost all of them have signed this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures, when Bill 83 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs; and

That the standing committee on finance and economic affairs shall be authorized to meet on June 15, 2004, from 10 am to 12 noon and following routine proceedings until 6 pm, and on June 16, 2004, from 10 am to 12 noon for the purpose of conducting public hearings on the bill, and that the committee be further authorized to meet on June 16, 2004, following routine proceedings or 4 pm, whichever is earlier, for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on June 16. No later than 5 pm on June 16, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill, and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 127(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House not later than June 17, 2004. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called on that same day; and

That at 5:50 pm or 9:20 pm as the case may be on the day that the order for third reading of the bill is called as the first government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That there shall be no deferral of any vote allowed pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mr Duncan?

Hon Mr Duncan: The government is anxious to get this bill into committee to allow public participation. We have had an important debate so far in this House, and I should point out that this particular budget bill has had almost five full days of debate time.

The Conservative government of Mr Harris and Mr Eves had 16 budget bills, 13 of which received no more than three days of second reading debate. We will be sending this bill out to committee for public consultation and clause-by-clause review, something the previous administration rarely did. Bill 83 will actually be debated at third reading. That is something that rarely happened under the previous government.

I would like the members of the official opposition and the third party to remember that their members have moved for adjournment of the debate 15 times: Mr Baird moved adjournment of the debate twice; Mr Yakabuski moved it twice; Ms Scott moved it twice; Mr O'Toole moved it twice; Mr Dunlop moved it once; Mr Marchese moved it twice; Ms Churley moved it twice; and Ms Martel moved it twice. They deprived roughly 40 members of the opportunity to participate in this debate.

The opposition finance critic, Mr Baird, voted 62 times for time allocation while he was in government. As government House leader, he has the most time allocation motions as a percentage of total bills of anyone in the history of this province. That is an absolutely embarrassing record, and he ought to be embarrassed. He said one thing then, and he does one thing now.

Mr Dunlop voted 55 times for time allocation, Mr Baird voted 62 times for time allocation, Mr Klees voted 59 times for time allocation, Mr Hudak voted 54 times for time allocation and Mr Runciman voted 52 times for time allocation. And do you know what? They have never voted against it until today.

The Eves government in the last session used time allocation on 83% of its bills. Mr Baird, as government House leader, has the most time allocations as a percentage of total bills of any House leader in the history of this Legislature.

Between 1999 and 2003 the Harris-Eves government used time allocation motions on 67 of the 110 government bills that received royal assent; that is 61% of the time. Under Eves, only once did a time-allocated bill allow for third reading debate. These tactics, which built upon the legacy of the NDP before them, illustrate a complete lack of respect for this institution.

1550

In opposition, as part of the select committee on the Legislature looking at parliamentary reform, I, on behalf of the official opposition at the time, the Liberal Party, advocated that time allocation was in fact an appropriate parliamentary tool, but that it should only be used probably no more than 10% of the time. I'm pleased to report that we have not even come close to using it on that.

We are anxious, however, to get this bill to committee. In eight years the Tories never had more than three days of second reading debate on a budget bill. We will have

had six days, twice as much, on our first bill. Only one quarter of Tory budget bills were ever sent to committee. Only one budget bill in eight years travelled during the Harris-Eves government. I find it rich that the opposition now has trouble with time allocation, when they have time-allocated every budget bill since 1998.

I find it rich that Mr Baird, who voted 62 times in favour of time allocation and never once voted against it, sits in his chair today and complains because we want a budget bill to go to committee and want a budget bill to receive third reading. I can understand why he's opposed to that, because when he was in government he made sure that never happened. It certainly never happened after 1998.

The Tories did not have public hearings on their first budget when they cut welfare by 21.6%, fired one third of the Ministry of the Environment staff, slashed education by $400 million, cut $400 million from our colleges and universities and took $552 million from our municipalities. Within the Eves government's last 50 calendar days in the Legislature, that government and that House leader used time allocation 15 times, 83% of the bills, and they are now going to start complaining about us? The reason they're against it? They have never supported committee at second reading in any of their budget bills, and they never supported third reading in their budget bills under time allocation.

I should also point out, lest they think they are as pure as the driven snow, that it was the NDP that in fact set the trend for the use of time allocation motions. The NDP used time allocation five times more than the previous Liberal government under David Peterson. There were, for instance, no public hearings when the NDP ripped up collective agreements with their social contract, and there was no time allocated for third reading debate on that particular issue.

There were no public hearings when the NDP raised the gas tax 3.4 cents a litre. Out of the 21 budget bills passed by the NDP during their reign, only one of them went to committee for public consultation. I will remind them that on Bill 146, their bill, Corporations Tax Amendment Act, 1994, three days of second reading debate, no committee and no third reading debate; Bill 160, Budget Measures Act, 1994, passed within one calendar month, five days of second reading debate, one day in standing committee and no days of third reading debate; and Bill 48, the infamous Social Contract Act, 1993, three days of second reading debate and one day of third reading debate.

The opposition, both the Conservatives and the NDP, have tried to adjourn the debate on this budget bill—how many times was it? I had better double-check. Let me count: 15 times they trade to adjourn the debate.

They are trying to keep us from taking this bill to committee, and that should be no surprise, because that party, that House leader, who did time allocation more than any government House leader in the history of this province, wants to keep the bill out of committee. The third party that tried to jam its social contract through with no public hearings, no committee, now wants to try to prevent this government from getting this bill to committee, and get two days of hearings, more hearings than they ever had on their social contract.

This is the first out of 10 bills that we have introduced and passed that has received time allocation, the lowest percentage since way back in the Bill Davis government. We're very proud of that. In addition, there are a number of other bills where there is agreement for passage by all three parties.

We look forward to getting this bill to committee. We look forward to this bill being the first budget bill to committee since 1998. We look forward to this being the first budget bill to get third reading debate since 1998.

I remind the people of Ontario that when they hear the Tories baying like hyenas on this, no government in the history of this province used time allocation more than they did; no government prevented committee hearing debates more than they did; no government denied this Legislature third reading more than they did.

We want to get on with the work. We want to get this bill into committee. We want to pass a bill that will provide an additional 36,000 cardiac procedures by 2007-08. We are anxious to get to committee to talk about the 2,300 additional joint replacements each year by 2007-08. We want to get to committee to talk about the funding of nine new MRI and CT sites, to talk about 9,000 cataract surgeries per year, and to talk about more than $600 million to support and reform primary care by 2004-05.

While the opposition House leader talks about a sham process, I must remind him that it was his government that changed the standing orders to provide for this process, so if there's a sham in this House, it's that member from Ottawa-Orléans.

Let me conclude by saying that unlike the Tories before us, we want to get to committee with this budget bill and we want to have third reading debate on this bill. I'm proud that we'll be the first government since 1998 to allow that.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I say to the government House Leader, he doesn't have the guts to stick around to hear me respond to that drivel. Dwight, you're looking at me in the lounge there. Get back in here and listen to it. Have the guts to listen to the response to that drive-by shooting. I know you didn't write that speech and I know the real Dwight Duncan didn't want to move this time allocation motion. It was Maria Papadopoulos who made you do it, and that's a disgrace. Shameful, Maria, for making him do that.

To say that this is a fair process, Ian Urqhart of the Toronto Star summed it up very well: "They have lost the moral high ground." They have broken virtually every major campaign promise they've made. Only 9% of the people of the province of Ontario think they're doing a good job. This budget—others have said it—is probably the most poorly received budget in contemporary Canadian political history.

Murray Campbell from the Globe and Mail said that Dalton McGuinty could be the first man in Canadian history to "bring down two majority governments within a year." That's how negatively this budget has been received. People are angry. They are livid. They are furious.

What does Sue Whelan, a good friend of Dwight Duncan who represents the constituency next to him, say?

"Ontario Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty should apologize for breaking his election promise not to raise taxes ... Susan Whelan said Tuesday."

"'I've never made the kind of promise that Dalton McGuinty did.... He owes the people of Ontario an apology for what he did.'"

I hope the Liberal cabinet will be around to appoint Susan Whelan to something when she loses her job next week. I was down in Windsor. I read the Windsor Star: "Local Tories Surge." Local Tories surge in Windsor: That is how unpopular this budget has been perceived. The other member for Windsor brought me a cartoon with a farmer going out to his barn to see if his pigs had grown wings. That's how outrageous this budget is.

1600

Conservatives will fight this budget every step of the way. We want to put on the table that these public hearings are a sham. There are six hours of public hearings, and there is not a single minute left, not a minute left—people could come before the committee with ideas, with suggestions for amendments, and people like Kim Craitor, the Liberal member for Niagara Falls, who's against part of this budget, can't even have time to listen and then to prepare an amendment to present before this committee.

But do you know what? Another part of this time allocation motion doesn't even matter. The committee, members of provincial Parliament, could propose and vote on and pass amendments, and then, in one clause in this time allocation motion, they can still ram the bill through even if the committee says it's bad, even if the committee says it's poorly conceived, even if the committee says it will hurt working families. That is the real outrage of this bill.

Dalton McGuinty promised a referendum, and not a single thing has changed since he made that promise. When he made that promise, the member for Scarborough-Agincourt stood smiling behind him. Who's the member for Scarborough-Agincourt? A well-respected man who said there was a $5-billion risk to this budget. The member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore stood behind the Liberal leader and applauded with a big smile on her face when he signed this pledge promising a referendum.

Well, I'll tell you, the people of Ontario are fixing to have a referendum of their own, and it's taking place on tax freedom day, which this year falls on June 28. Tax freedom day will be the opportunity for the people of the province of Ontario to get a little tax relief by going to the federal election booth and voting for people like, in Essex, Jeff Watson, or in Windsor West, people like Jordan Katz, to send a message to these Liberals that we won't accept your broken promises, we won't accept your tax increases, we won't accept your cuts to health care. People of Ontario should know, if this bill passes, leave your health card at home when you go to some health care practitioners, but bring your Amex card, because that's the new Dalton McGuinty/Paul Martin style health care.

I don't believe anything these people say. I don't trust them. The people of Ontario have never, ever been so distrustful and cynical of government in the past. They don't believe anything this Liberal government has to say. They don't believe you. In the next election campaign, the Liberals won't be able to make any promises because nobody trusts them, nobody believes them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Further debate? The Chair recognizes the member, I believe, from Trinity-Spadina. He's got his coat on.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): You believe correctly, Speaker.

First of all, Speaker, New Democrats oppose this strangulation motion, as indeed they opposed the strangulation motions of the previous government.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: A strangulation motion, Michael Colle, is when you choke off debate because you're basically afraid to listen to those in the opposition parties who have something to say. So strangulation motions, I don't like them. I never did.

Secondly, I get awfully tired when some of these Liberals, especially Dwight—he wasn't here in 1990, so he pompously makes reference to so many things of which he knows so little. What he doesn't know is that New Democrats had so many hearings on almost literally every bill except the only one that they will mention, and they say, "Ah, but there's one." It's so inane, it's so infantile, because if there was an error that New Democrats made, it was that we had too many hearings, allowing the enemies to beat us up and allowing our own friends to beat us up. So, please, Dwight, wherever you are, because you're probably watching television—please.

I get awfully tired with all the Liberals, Dwight included, and everyone else who makes reference to it: When they have no defence whatsoever, they go back into their little histories, not as far as Patti Starr, but they go back into their little histories and they say, "Ha, but the NDP in 1990 had a huge deficit. Liberals would never allow that." Concurrently they say, "Ha, but the NDP cut or increased tuition fees, or cut something else."

Isn't it beautiful? If you're a Liberal, you can say whatever you like. "Deficits are bad, but you didn't spend enough over here." If you did, you would have a greater deficit. For the Liberals, they can go wherever they want, which they do as a matter of something innate to their philosophy, and it's OK. It's incredible what you guys can say and do. Do you think you get away with it? I don't think so, but I thought I would point out that you look awfully bad, when you have no defence, to simply go back into some little history of 14 or 15 years ago and

say, "I got something. Let's attack them on this." Go back to Patti Starr, she wrote it in 1993. Go back to 1989. Check your own histories out.

Then, I say, go back prior to the election of October 2 just to see what Gerry Phillips, the now Chair of Management Board, had to say about deficits. First of all, you made some incredibly stupid promises. You did. It's hard to admit to because it's a problem. You can't defend it.

Here's what you said prior to the election: You are going to increase services by $7 billion. Gerry knows because he was a finance critic. You're not going to increase taxes. You're going to deal with the deficit, and you're going to balance the budget. Do you understand, good citizens? It's 4:10 in the afternoon. Do you understand what I'm saying about what Liberals said before the election? "More services,"—$7 billion—"no tax increase, we'll deal with the deficit and we'll balance the budget." Do you realize how inane that was and how stupid it was for you to have made such promises?

So while you attack the Tories, in terms of saying that they didn't quite admit they had a deficit, how can you say that while simultaneously dealing with the problem that Gerry Phillips had, which is that in the committee of that June, prior to the election, June of 2003, he said that the Tories will have had a $5-billion risk. He gets angry every time I say it, but a $5-billion risk in my mind, however you might criticize this mind, in my humble view is a deficit.

So Gerry Phillips, well respected by some journalists in terms of his ability to be able to get finance books—it's not here—would show those finance books and read a couple of numbers out every now and then. The media said, "Oh, my God, he's so credible on financial issues." Well, Gerry is a credible guy. Gerry Phillips, prior to the election, said—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: John, you're speaking over me—"The Tories are likely to have a $5-billion deficit." Well, I trusted Gerry.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: What, Michael?

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Come on. Michael Colle, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, let me tell you what we said. Howard Hampton said, "They are leaving us with a $4-billion deficit." Howard Hampton said that before the election. Gerry Phillips said, "There is a $5-billion problem." The Fraser Institute agreed with Gerry when they estimated, in their humble right-wing point of view, that the Conservatives were going to leave a $4-billion deficit.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: No, I believed Gerry, who said there would be a $5-billion deficit.

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): You're lying.

Mr Marchese: Now, Gerry. Speaker, did you hear what he said? Come on, Gerry.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair of Management Board, withdraw.

Hon Mr Phillips: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Proceed.

Mr Marchese: Do you see how it ticked him off? Gerry wasn't listening before when I said, good listeners, citizens all, Gerry Phillips, the Chair of Management Board, is quite angry when Rosario Marchese said that he said in June 2003, in committee, that there would be a—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I'm having difficulty hearing the member. Chair of Management Board, member for Nepean-Carleton, if you want a conversation, do it outside.

Proceed.

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Mr Marchese: Gerry Phillips, Management Board minister, in committee in June 2003, said in his estimation there would be a $5-billion—he said—risk. He says if you say "deficit," someone is being mendacious, if you say that. But if you say it's a "risk," then in his view—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Trinity-Spadina, withdraw that comment.

Mr Marchese: Did somebody tell you that that was improper to say?

The Acting Speaker: Withdraw it.

Mr Marchese: I withdraw that "mendacious" word.

The Acting Speaker: It's withdrawn and I don't want to hear it again. Proceed.

Mr Marchese: See, the clerks are listening. That's terrible, when they listen.

Hon Mr Phillips: You're making it up.

Mr Marchese: I am making it up? Gerry, come on. We're buddies under normal circumstances but, please, come on. You said—

Hon Mr Phillips: You check Hansard. You said something I never said.

Mr Marchese: But, Gerry, you said there was a $5-billion risk. In my humble estimation, risk and deficits are the same. But I will let the good citizens of Ontario decide for themselves whether "risk" is some undefinable word that doesn't relate at all to deficits. I'll leave it to the public. Why quibble about that?

So I am telling you, good citizens, the Liberals made some dumb, dumb, dumb promises. Then they get into government and they have to attack the Tories by saying, "They didn't tell the truth about their deficit."

I say to the Liberals, you didn't tell the truth about your own promises, and you could have done that. You had a choice before October 2003 to say, "We cannot keep our promises." Only after you got elected did you say, "We can't keep our promises any more." Then you are stuck with having to introduce a budget that whacks the poorest citizens of Ontario. You understand? You understand how dumb your politics is and was? You are now stuck with a budget that you can't defend, that not even your federal members of Parliament can defend, that each and every one of those federal members is

attacking you for because it's costing many of them their jobs. I know it's hard for you to admit that, but, man, have you caused some serious hurt to your Liberal counterparts in Ottawa, and they're reeling. They are hurting, for good reasons.

You've introduced a budget that introduces a health tax that whacks the most vulnerable citizens of this province. How does it whack them? Under 35,000 bucks, many of them, most of them—originally those who made $20,000 plus one penny were going to be whacked with $300 a year. Then, when you realized how bad it was, you changed it. So now, under $35,000, many will get whacked with $300 a year. But you understand, if you're earning $20,000, $25,000, $30,000, you're barely existing; you're barely paying your rent, in Toronto at least. It's not enough to live on in Toronto, that kind of money. That kind of individual is going to get whacked with 300 bucks, and if the partner is working, it's another 300 bucks. They're saying they are investing back into health, but you've got to go after the working poor to get that money?

So you have Mr Sorbara, my friend under normal circumstances, saying, "Oh, the NDP is always going after the rich." Sorry. The NDP makes no apologies for going after those who have money. In our humble view, those who have little should not be paying, because they don't have. It's as simple as that. Those who have money, as our leader says often, those who have been the biggest recipients of the income tax cuts under the previous Conservative government, are the ones who should be paying their fair share, not those at the bottom end of the socio-economic spectrum. It's just not good politics. It's not good for Liberals, who often put their hands to their hearts and say, "Yeah, we've got a heart." You guys just don't look good when you do that. It's not progressive at all.

A banker earns 1.5 million bucks, plus other glorious benefits, and he gets to pay 900 bucks. That poor banker is hurting a lot. Why, that poor banker is going to start walking off to the United States, because you whacked him big time with 900 bucks more that he's able to pay. You understand your problem? It's not good for Liberals.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): Rosario, why don't you mention the surtax?

Mr Marchese: Member for Essex, I remind you, this doesn't look good on you. It's OK for those of you who are fiscally conservative—and there are many Liberals like that—but it's not good for those who think they're progressive, not good at all.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Yeah, you do that. Stand up and do that, member from Essex. Go ahead and defend that budget.

I am telling you, this budget is about socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor. That's what this budget is all about. I understand that you would want to give the public only a couple of hours, because you people don't want to hear from the good people out there. Why would you give them more time so they can beat you up on a budget that you can't defend? I understand that. That's why we are opposed to the strangulation motion, because we are the ones here who can defend the interests of the public when they themselves are not able to speak on their own. With six hours of discussion, you're not going to hear much.

I've got to tell you, I am looking with great interest to see how many people the Liberals are going to be able to bring to this Legislature to defend their budget. I am looking forward to that, because it will be fascinating to see how many of your Liberal friends are going to say, "This is a great budget."

What about this cost for the vaccinations? "George Smitherman said the program is 'a very good example of what a health premium does to provide premium health care in the province of Ontario.'" Then he makes another remark and says, "Smitherman acknowledged the province is getting federal dollars for the immunization strategy and is 'dedicating all of it' to the program....

"An official with the federal Department of Finance said Ontario's share ... is $155.8 million." These are the dollars that the federal government dedicated to the province. George Smitherman, the Minister of Finance and the Premier said, "This levy we are imposing on the most vulnerable citizens is going to go for vaccinations," and then we learn that the federal government is paying for all of that. But they told us this health care levy, for which many are being whacked, was going to go for these vaccinations, only to discover that the federal government is giving that money. You understand, you can't have it both ways. George can't say, "This health tax is dedicated for vaccinations," and then at the same time learn that the federal government is giving you that money. I'm telling you, it's bad.

That delisting of chiropractors, optometrists and physiotherapists, it's 200 million bucks. For those of you who are believers, why in God's name would you be doing that? It cost 200 million bucks. The pain that you're imposing on so many people—what's the rationale? I have never heard a Liberal talk honestly about why you would take away those services that many Ontarians want and defend—

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): And need.

Mr Marchese: —and need to save 200 million bucks.

Mr Kormos: For whom?

Mr Marchese: For whom? Why would you allow yourself to be beaten up so badly by the public? Why would you do it? Why would you allow yourself? It's like you like to flagellate yourselves. It's like self-immolation. It's like saying, "It's OK, I want to be beaten up." Something's wrong with that, right? Medically, there's probably a term. Masochism, maybe? I don't know.

1620

This is a budget that you can't defend. This is a budget that's going to cause you a whole lot of pain. This is a budget that's going to cause the loss of many federal Liberal MPs. For me, it's too bad, so sad. But you will have to take responsibility for that. It must be awful to have so many Liberal members saying to you privately—

because you can't do this publicly, of course—"Why in God's name would you do this?" Individual members are saying: "I know, I know. We told them so in caucus meeting. We're telling them but nobody will listen to us."

Mr Kormos: It's so bad they've got Bradley going to the casino.

Mr Marchese: Poor Bradley, with the opening of that casino. Some of you are new, but do you remember when Jim Bradley used to say, "We oppose the one-armed bandits"? Every statement he made, he would stand up at every opportunity: "We oppose the one-armed bandits." Well, he went the other day to open one up. Isn't that funny? A lot of fun with that.

We oppose this strangulation motion. We think it's bad. Your budget is bad. It's hurting a whole lot of people. They will punish you. They won't punish you right away, but they will punish your federal friends, and that's OK by me.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I'm pleased to take part in this debate. I listened to the government House leader talk about what we did when we were in government in this province. Yes, we brought in many time allocation motions. I was always in favour of time allocation because all three parties at that time were diametrically opposed philosophically on the direction that our government was taking and what the other parties in this House believed to be the case. It hasn't changed.

The problem I have with the time allocation bill brought in by the government House leader is that he talked at great length during the election about democratic renewal. That was one of their major platforms, and they railed against time allocation motions. But that was then, this is now. Now you're in government, and time allocation bills are OK. Do you see the problem that I'm having with this? That was then, this is now. What you said then isn't what you're doing now, not only with time allocation bills but with almost every major platform that you had during the last election. You've changed your minds.

One member talked about—

Mr Crozier: Are you still in favour of them?

Mr Chudleigh: Yes, I'm in favour of time allocation bills. I'm not in favour of time allocation bills by parties who go out and tell the Ontario electorate that they're not going to do that; they're going to have a brand-new democratic renewal. They come back into this House and they do exactly what they said they would not do. We never promised we wouldn't do that. You did. And we built 29 new hospitals too. The health care system in this province was one hell of a lot better when we left government than when we arrived.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): That's not true.

Mr Chudleigh: It's true from over here.

I'll give you a quote: "Once again, we have another time allocation motion. I really wish I'd been here at a time when we had democracy working in Ontario and bills were introduced and debated and committees reviewed them, and they went across Ontario and they listened to people and they brought them back and made changes. That must have been a delightful era. The shame is that it's not here right now." That quote is from one Ernie Parsons, member for Prince Edward-Hastings, and it's in Hansard, June 23, 2003.

Incidentally, I have eight pages of quotes about time allocation and how bad it is. They're from Prince Edward county; they're from York South-Weston; the member sitting in the front row of this government, James Bradley—oh, my goodness, the member for St Catharines. He has a number: "We have yet another time allocation motion. For people who are watching at home, I have to say, that's a motion which chokes off debate on an important piece of legislation." This is the same member for St Catharines who talked about democratic renewal, about listening to what the people of Ontario have to say. My goodness; how times have changed. "What do we have this afternoon? We are dealing instead with a time allocation motion, which the government routinely invokes now to push legislation through." That's a quote from the member for St Catharines, June 17, 2003.

As I said before, I have no problem with time allocation bills. I have a problem with time allocation bills when political parties go to the people of Ontario and say, "We're not going to do that. We're going to renew democracy in this province." Then they come back into this House, they get a large dose of reality and they do exactly what they want to do. It's, "Don't do as I say; do as I did."

It's interesting that all of your defence on this motion and on the entire session that we've had revolves around whether or not there was a deficit that was our responsibility. I would say to you, yes, there's a certain portion of that deficit that is our responsibility—about $1.5 billion, actually. We brought in a budget in March—an infamous budget, I might add—of about $71.5 billion.

During the committee hearings that we had on that budget in May—you remember that concept of having committee hearings on a budget?—Mr Phillips talked about the problems that he saw with that budget, and he was quite right. He pointed out, as I recall—I was in that committee at the time—four areas where the government had a problem. One of the areas was the sale of assets. "What are those assets going to be?" was a question he asked, and he put a figure beside that. He talked about the revenue figure, as to whether or not that revenue figure would be realized. At that time, we had SARS to consider. That was before the power blackout and before the West Nile virus, but the West Nile virus had been around the year before. He said, "What effect will that have?" I forget the fourth thing you mentioned, Gerry—the member for Scarborough-Agincourt—but there were four of them.

He said there was a risk, and I would point out to the member from Trinity-Spadina that a risk is not a deficit. The member for Scarborough-Agincourt pointed out that there was a risk of a $5-billion shortfall of funds. As a government, we were prepared to handle that. Because of the power failure, because of West Nile, because of

SARS, because of BSE, our revenues fell short by $1.5 billion in the budget that we presented. We should take responsibility for that $1.5 billion, but if we had been elected last October, which is only six months into the fiscal year, we would have changed that $1.5 billion and balanced the budget. However, from October 2 until the end of March, the end of that fiscal year, your government did next to nothing to address the deficit that was bound to happen in this province. So if there was a $5.6-billion deficit, $4 billion of it hangs around your neck.

1630

But the worst part about what we're debating today on this closure motion, this time allocation motion, is how you went to the people of Ontario and you promised one thing, and you delivered another in every major part of your platform. The promises that you have kept have been small promises, almost motherhood issues.

The chiropractors, the physiotherapists, the optometrists—I was interested to listen to the member for Trinity-Spadina, next door, talk about how it was only $200 million. To an NDPer, I guess $200 million isn't a lot of money. What's $200 million? Well, to an NDPer it's a start. It's just a start, and they'll drive it up from there. However, those people are no longer available to the working people of Ontario, and that is a shame.

You are now involved in a two-tier health care system, and that is a slippery slope. One you've started, that's a very slippery slope. When the people of Ontario don't have equal access to the things they need to keep them in a healthy environment, that indeed is a very slippery slope that you've started down. I would warn the members who are sitting here, especially those who are sitting here for the first time, be active in caucus, because your voices can be heard. And when your constituents tell you that they are not happy with the direction that you're going, listen carefully, because those are the same constituents who are going to see you out of here without a pension in the very near future. So be careful. Be careful where you go and be careful what you wish for, because you may be there reaping those benefits.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Oak Ridges.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased—

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Tell us the snowbank story, Frank.

Interjection: Where are those two kids?

Mr Klees: At the very outset, honourable members from the backbench of the Liberal Party are asking in jest about the kids in the snowbank. Let me give you the context of their question.

The fact of the matter is that this government continues to introduce legislation into this place in which clearly the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. It's clear that this government—

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): What does this have to do with a snowbank?

Mr Klees: Here's what it has to do with. The fact is that most of the legislation that we've seen introduced is wrong-headed, has absolutely no sense of purpose or direction, and is contrary—in fact is totally unrelated to anything that's ever been promised by the Liberal Party. The things they have promised to do, they haven't done. The things they are doing are unconscionable. So is it any wonder that the latest poll has 8% of the people in the province saying they believe this Premier? That can't be very comforting for the backbench. It can't be very comforting for those of you friends, colleagues, who have the responsibility to back up the Premier and to back up the cabinet on the direction they are taking. I feel for you.

I'm pleased to enter into this debate, because for those who are listening at home, it's important to understand what it is we are debating. We're now debating a motion to bring closure to the debate on Bill 83. What that means is that this government, having started on a path of first breaking a promise, a promise that was made on the election trail—the first thing they did was to break a promise on the election trail. Premier McGuinty signed a pledge that he would keep the law of this province, namely the Taxpayer Protection Act. He made another commitment at the same time in that same signing of that pledge that he would not raise taxes, not a single penny. People remember well Dalton McGuinty looking into their television screen and saying, "I will not raise your taxes." So the Premier broke that promise. Once he got here as the Premier, he now has decided to break the law, and having broken the law, the people of this province are fed up and calling on this Premier to keep the law.

Interjections.

Mr Klees: I am being asked to move adjournment of debate, and I have to say that I will do that in the interest of demonstrating to the people of this province that we in opposition have no option but to move adjournment of debate.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Oak Ridges has moved adjournment of the debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members: a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1636 to 1706.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 12; the nays are 41.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Further debate?

Mr Klees: On behalf of the people of Ontario, who want to have their input into this budget, I move the motion be amended as follows:

That the last seven paragraphs be deleted and the following substituted: "That the standing committee on finance and economic affairs shall be authorized to travel and meet in the month of August and hold public consultations in Ottawa, Brockville, Pembroke, Lindsay, Bur-

lington, Jordan, Whitby, Kitchener, Orangeville, Newmarket, Sutton, Port Dover, Halton Hills, Fergus, Midland, Parry Sound, Collingwood, Oshawa, Woodstock, Barrie and Clarington."

Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: You can't move adjournment of the House until I deal with the amendment to the motion.

Mr Klees has moved an amendment to the motion, which reads as follows:

That the last seven paragraphs be deleted and the following substituted: "That the standing committee on finance and economic affairs shall be authorized to travel and meet in the month of August and hold public consultations in Ottawa, Brockville, Pembroke, Lindsay, Burlington, Jordan, Whitby, Kitchener, Orangeville, Newmarket, Sutton, Port Dover, Halton Hills, Fergus, Midland, Parry Sound, Collingwood, Oshawa, Woodstock, Barrie and Clarington."

Mr Klees: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1710 to 1740.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 12; the nays are 37.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Further debate on the amendment to the motion?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I would first like to move that the amendment to the motion be amended by adding the following:

"Clarington."

The Acting Speaker: Mr Bisson has moved an amendment to add the following:

"Clarington."

Mr Bisson: As you well know, it's very important that we recognize that the government is moving time allocation here today.

Mr Kormos: Shame.

Interjections: Shame.

Mr Bisson: Shame on them, as my good friend from Niagara Centre and others have said. This is the government that while in opposition used to rail against governments that moved time allocation motions on many opportunities. In the last election I ran, like everybody else, all the candidates in the last election—the Liberals said to us, "If we form the next majority government, we're going to reform the way democracy is made in this House." They said, "We're going to make sure we're going to have greater democracy inside the Legislature," and that they wouldn't deal with time allocation in the way other governments had before.

It's another broken promise that we can add on top of the list of promise after promise that this government has broken since being over there. I've got to say, I'm a little bit disappointed; as a matter of fact, I'm greatly disappointed, because they decided to do it on one of the most fundamental things, the budget.

Budgets are basically the most important things we debate in this House during the course of the government and the calendar year. It sets out for the government what they plan on doing when it comes to expenditure and policy over the next fiscal year. The government, in this case, is doing some things in this budget—most of them I don't agree with, but a couple of them particularly.

First of all, they've decided to impose the most regressive tax measure we've seen in Ontario in many years. We have a tax measure on the part of this government that's going to say, if you're a $30,000-income earner in the province and you're working hard to pay your bills, "It's OK, you can pay 24% more in taxes in Ontario." But if you're a $100,000-a-year income earner, the government's saying, "Two per cent, 3%, that's fair. After all, people with more money should pay less taxes."

I say we should have a system of taxation that's fair, that says we should recognize the ability of people to pay, not overtax people. I don't argue that for a second as a New Democrat. I just say that it's important we make sure people pay their fair share.

What's even more regressive: Do you remember those insurance companies that jacked up insurance costs to motorists across this province, who were refusing to insure hard-working people when it came to their homes in some communities? They made record profits last year and this government's giving them a gift. They're saying, "You can have a tax reduction," and the hard-working people in this province have to pay more taxes.

Nobody argues that we need money to pay for health care, but the argument is that we have to do it in a progressive way, and this tax measure is probably one of the most regressive tax measures I've seen, certainly in the time I've been here and probably in a long time in this Legislature.

To top it all off, this government then says, "We're going to delist essential services such as services that are provided by health care professionals in our communities across Ontario." For example, they're going to delist chiropractors. They're going to delist eye doctors. They're going to delist physiotherapists and others. What a dumb move. The person who has a bad back and has to see his or her chiropractor ends up in a situation where it's not covered any more. They're going to say, "Well, I guess I'll stay home. I can't afford to go." What's going to happen to them? They will get into a crisis. All of a sudden that person will have to go either to the doctor's office or to the emergency room, where (a) it's more expensive, and (b) it's already taxed.

I spent an entire morning and afternoon on the phone dealing with an issue in our community, where our hospital system is overcrowded and we're discharging ALC—alternate level of care—patients into communities across the region. We know we're in a crisis in health care, and this government is saying, "We're going to

remove health care professionals from the health continuum in places like Timmins." It makes absolutely no sense. In an area where we're underserviced by physicians, where we're underserviced by services overall, the government says, "We're going to withdraw from the health care continuum all those other professions that are really important to the whole health continuum when it comes to providing services."

I really have to say that this is one of the most regressive things I have seen in a long time in this Legislature. I think the government would be well served to allow this bill to go to committee so that at the end of the day people have an opportunity to present. Then they can see, as they are seeing in this provincial government and in this federal election, that they are in a position where the voters are pretty unhappy. It's a really interesting time we have here.

With that, I would like to move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I say the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1747 to 1817.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and remain standing. Members, please be seated.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing. Members, please be seated.

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 9; the nays are 36.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Mr Bisson has moved that the motion be amended as follows: by adding the word "Clarington."

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1820 to 1830.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bisson, Gilles	Hardeman, Ernie	Wilson, Jim
Chudleigh, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Witmer, Elizabeth
Churley, Marilyn	Sterling, Norman W.	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please stand one at a time and remain standing.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Duncan, Dwight	Racco, Mario G.
Broten, Laurel C.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Hoy, Pat	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Jeffrey, Linda	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Cordiano, Joseph	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	Mitchell, Carol	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Dhillon, Vic	Parsons, Ernie	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Peterson, Tim	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Phillips, Gerry	

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 8; the nays are 37.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment lost.

Mr Klees has moved an amendment to the motion, which reads as follows:

"That the last seven paragraphs be deleted and the following be substituted:

"That the standing committee on finance and economic affairs shall be authorized to travel and meet in the month of August and hold public consultations in Ottawa, Brockville, Pembroke, Lindsay, Burlington, Jordan, Whitby, Kitchener, Orangeville, Newmarket, Sutton, Port Dover, Halton Hills, Fergus, Midland, Parry Sound, Collingwood, Oshawa, Woodstock, Barrie and Clarington."

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1833 to 1843.

The Acting Speaker: All those members in favour, please rise one at a time and remain standing.

Ayes

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Wilson, Jim
Chudleigh, Ted	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Sterling, Norman W.	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time and remain standing.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Duncan, Dwight	Racco, Mario G.
Broten, Laurel C.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Hoy, Pat	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Jeffrey, Linda	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Cordiano, Joseph	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	Mitchell, Carol	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Dhillon, Vic	Parsons, Ernie	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Peterson, Tim	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Phillips, Gerry	

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 8; the nays are 37.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

Mr Duncan has moved government notice of motion number 146.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I declare that the ayes have it.

Call in the members; a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1846 to 1849.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Duncan, Dwight	Racco, Mario G.
Broten, Laurel C.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Hoy, Pat	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Jeffrey, Linda	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Cordiano, Joseph	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	Mitchell, Carol	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Dhillon, Vic	Parsons, Ernie	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Peterson, Tim	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Phillips, Gerry	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Wilson, Jim
Chudleigh, Ted	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Sterling, Norman W.	

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 37; the nays are 8.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being past 6:45 pm, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 pm, Monday, June 14.

The House adjourned at 1851.

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Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 14 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 14 juin 2004

The House met at 1330.
Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COMMUNITY DAY

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I rise today to congratulate the Durham regional police and the Whitby community policing committee on their successful 11th annual Community Day. This event marks the largest community police day in Ontario. Police officers come from across Durham region with police displays, including police dog demonstrations, information from the tactical support unit, marine patrol, forensic identification unit and, of course, Air 1.

I want to recognize the police officers who were at the great event on June 13, 2004, and thank them for taking the time to host this fun and educational day. Ontario's police officers routinely go beyond the call of duty to protect their neighbours and their communities. They are true everyday heroes, and they have earned the respect and support of all the people in Whitby and across Ontario.

This event clearly emphasized building safer communities by building crime prevention. This year, thousands of people participated in the 11th annual Community Day and helped raise money for the Kids' Safety Village and community policing and also for Racing Against Drugs.

I was pleased to attend the event this year and look forward to next year's Community Day. We're also looking forward to the official opening of the new police station in Whitby in about two weeks' time.

ST MATTHEW HIGH SCHOOL

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I am proud today to honour the accomplishments of the students of St Matthew high school in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans. On April 23, in an act of great generosity and a spirit of community, 5,117 students, staff and neighbours gathered together to take part in the Guinness Book of World Records breaking bear hug, for which they received their official certificate on June 7. The 1,400 St Matthew students were joined by 30 busloads of high school students from St Peters, Lester B. Pearson and St Pius high schools and from Divine Infant, Chapel Hill, Convent Glen and Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha elementary schools, as well as 900 members of the general public, of which I was pleased to be one.

Although the Guinness Book of World Records distinction is fun and something to be proud of, what is significant is that the students of St Matt's were able to raise an astonishing $108,000 through the event for the Ottawa Regional Cancer Centre. According to our local media, the sum blew the previous national high school record completely out of the water.

A major part of the joy and inspiration for the event came from one St Matthew student, Erin Gannon, an 18-year-old young woman who fought a battle with cancer for two and one half years with deep faith and courage but succumbed to the illness just days after the bear hug. It is her spirit and heart that stirred a community and that indeed marks the character of many of our young people today.

EXPLOSION IN ELMIRA

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I want to inform the House about an explosion and fire at the Crompton plant in Elmira, which happened last Friday morning. I'm doing so in order to express my gratitude and appreciate for the rapid and effective response by the municipal officials from the township of Woolwich and the region of Waterloo.

While en route to Toronto on Friday morning, I was informed of the incident. Apparently, according to published reports, a waste water tank exploded and burst into flames at approximately 8:20 that morning. The initial reports I received from the minister's office indicated that our local officials had the situation well under control. I insisted on speaking to the Minister of the Environment to ensure that she would be fully briefed on the situation and, if necessary, be in a position to take appropriate action.

From the information currently available, it appears that the entire emergency response system worked very well. The town siren warned the residents that they were on high alert, and then a phone call went out to all residents asking that they stay inside, keep their windows closed and listen to the radio for further reports.

When I arrived at the plant in the afternoon, I was very relieved to know that the situation had stabilized and everyone was safe. For that, I thank the 75 firefighters from the stations in Elmira, St Jacobs and Floradale, who worked through the morning with Crompton's own fire brigade. The Kitchener Fire Department provided back-up. I must tell this House that those township firefighters are volunteer firefighters, and I commend Chief Earl Wideman and his crews on a job well done.

I want to acknowledge the role of the Ministry of the Environment, who deployed the mobile TAGA unit—TAGA stands for trace atmospheric gas analyzer. It was on the scene to ensure that our air was safe to breath. The township of Woolwich mayor, Bill Strauss, and township staff responded superbly. I want the House to be aware of their extraordinary leadership and how they rose to the occasion to ensure that residents in Elmira were protected and safe.

URBAN SPRAWL

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): The Liberals talked a good line with respect to protecting the Oak Ridges moraine when they were in opposition, and they got into government after making a promise that they would protect it. They ended up breaking that promise and allowing 6,000 new houses to be built.

The government had another opportunity to test its commitment to curbing urban sprawl and protecting environmentally sensitive land. Local ratepayers are begging for help. It's the Wild West out there. Look at what's going on in Simcoe county: Developers are literally leapfrogging over the protected area and the greenbelt and are starting to build all kinds of low-density housing there.

I put forward a number of amendments in committee to deal with leapfrog development in particular but also with the Niagara Escarpment not getting as good protection as the Oak Ridges moraine and other important amendments. Not one Liberal member on that committee stood up and supported one of these amendments, which would have made this commitment to curb urban sprawl real. As it is now, it's another broken promise.

This was the acid test of the government's commitment to curb the urban sprawl, and they failed miserably. There will be a debate on the greenbelt coming up in this Legislature, and I urge the Liberal members, if they want to keep their commitment to curb urban sprawl, to have a committee of the whole House and allow those amendments to come forward once again.

1340

FOOD SAFETY

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): A recent Decima Research poll showed that 93% of Ontarians are confident that Canadian farmers provide us with high-quality food. It also showed that 86% of Ontarians believe their food supply is well regulated and safe to eat. That confidence is a result of positive change in food delivery regulations that the McGuinty government has brought to the province of Ontario.

I'm proud to stand and recognize the work this government has done to rebuild Ontario's meat inspection programs and strengthen the province's food safety system. We are ensuring that we have the highest safety and quality standards for our food. We have appointed the Honourable Roland Haines to review Ontario's meat regulatory and inspection regimes.

Small and medium-sized food processing plants are an essential part of Ontario's food production industry. We have introduced a new food safety system for small and medium-sized food processing plants, called the hazard analysis critical control point. This voluntary program minimizes the risk of food safety hazards and helps ensure the manufacture of safe food products by detecting potential hazards before they occur.

Perhaps most essential is the McGuinty government's hiring of more full-time meat inspectors to fill the void left by reckless Conservative cuts to essential services in Ontario.

With these actions, we have turned the corner in restoring the confidence of Ontarians in their government and the services we provide.

AGRICULTURAL HALL OF GAME

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the 2004 inductees to the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame.

One of those inductees is particularly deserving. A pioneer in direct farm marketing, now commonplace in Ontario, and an innovator in growing and production techniques, this inductee hails from my riding. I'm particularly pleased that he is my brother, Tom Chudleigh. On Sunday, he was honoured with induction into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame.

As he mentioned in his opening remarks yesterday, Tom's partnership with his wife, Carol, started with the words, "I do." Their innovations with high-density tree fruit production, revolutionary pruning techniques and integrated pest management have had a significant impact on the efficiency of Ontario's apple industry.

Tom and Carol introduced "entertainment farming" as part of his leadership in the area of value added agritourism, an alternative to traditional wholesale marketing practices. In addition, Tom and Carol, with the help of their sons, Dean, Scott and Michael, produced a line of products for local markets, which are now sold nationally and internationally, especially to the US and Japan. Products such as Apple Blossoms and Chudleigh's Apple Pies were born on the farm and are now enjoyed at dinner tables around the world.

I hope all members will join with me in congratulating my brother, Tom Chudleigh, and his wife, Carol, and all the other inductees into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame.

IMMIGRANTS

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Last Friday morning in London at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, I was proud to make an announcement, with my colleague Deb Matthews, on the government's newcomer settlement program. I was pleased to be able to tell three London organizations that their government was fulfilling its promise to help those who arrive here from another country.

In London, we are going to be helping such organizations as the Cross Cultural Learner Centre and LUSO, which teach people English, help them to find an apartment and settle in their new hometown of London. Mary Williamson is the executive director of the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, and she does a great job helping newcomers feel welcome. We are helping the WIL employment organization, which assists new immigrants to Ontario find work and educational opportunities.

This is something close to my heart, because in 1989 I was a newcomer to Ontario. I couldn't speak English, only knew a few people here and wasn't too sure where to start on my new journey. But I knew one thing for sure: I was home here in Ontario. Because of the help I received from the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, and the few friends I had at the time, I began to build a life for myself. I started businesses, hired employees and began to contribute to my new home.

That is what makes Ontario a great province. We welcome newcomers to Ontario, and we understand that immigrants bring new energy, talent and skills to the economy of Ontario and help make our communities strong.

Today is a good day for Ontario. Our government is laying out a welcome mat for newcomers by assisting community newcomer settlement programs.

CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF EASTERN ONTARIO

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Chalk this announcement up to one more commitment delivered on by the McGuinty government. Our pledge to save the cardiac unit of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario was fulfilled last Friday when the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care announced that prominent heart surgeon and senator Dr Wilbert Keon would oversee a joint pediatric cardiac surgery program between hospitals in Toronto and Ottawa. Dr Keon will help implement the program at Toronto's Sick Kids Hospital and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa.

I'm sure we all remember the previous Conservative government having terminated the pediatric care surgery unit at the Children's Hospital of Western Ontario in London in the summer of 2002, which left large swaths of underserviced areas in the province, instead favouring a centralized point of delivery in Toronto for child health care. The reckless cuts to spending by the former Conservative government have not only deeply impaired the finances of Ontario but also, in this case, almost resulted in the closing of an extremely important point of delivery for children's health in eastern Ontario.

It is encouraging to see that the McGuinty government has its priorities straight. We committed to keeping both pediatric cardiac surgery units open last fall and we are delivering. It is essential that we maintain a system that has a capacity for being in more than one physical location, as SARS has shown us. This announcement is reflective of the commitment of the government to ensure the health for all Ontarians throughout Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Could I ask the members to keep private conversations a bit lower.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): As revelations go, this was a doozy: Over the weekend, John Tory, the leading candidate to replace Mr Eves, acknowledged that his party should have been more forthcoming about the state of the province's finances during the last election. According to a CBC report, Mr Flaherty agreed, admitting he was surprised by the size of the financial mess. Finally, after months of denial and a clearly orchestrated effort to blame everybody else, a couple of sorry Tories have come forward, actually prepared to come clean.

What I found fascinating was that Mr Flaherty, former finance minister and consummate insider, would admit to having been blindsided by the state of affairs. If true, and I have no doubt it is, then the new government and the new Premier must, out of a sense of decency, be given even more benefit of the doubt. If, as we have learned, Mr Flaherty was surprised by the size of the deficit, imagine the new Premier's and the new government's absolute astonishment at learning that the real deficit figure was more than three times the $2 billion we had projected. Is it any wonder that so many citizens remain cynical and distrustful of politicians and politics when a situation like this exists?

My mother used to say, "When you mess up, fess up." Today I want to applaud Mr Tory and Mr Flaherty for taking mom's advice and finally summing up the courage to fess up. I want to say to all my Tory friends that there is hope for you, indeed for all of us, when we recognize that it is the truth, and only the truth, that shall finally set us free.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Midwestern Legislative Conference of the Council of State Governments. They are Senator John Hottinger from Minnesota, Representative Libby Jacobs from Iowa and Representative Stephen Buehrer from Ohio. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on

Monday, June 14, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mr Caplan has moved government notice of motion 131. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1350 to 1355.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Dombrowsky, Leona	Peters, Steve
Bartolucci, Rick	Duguid, Brad	Peterson, Tim
Bentley, Christopher	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Fonseca, Peter	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Gerretsen, John	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Marsales, Judy	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Cordiano, Joseph	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Crozier, Bruce	Milloy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Delaney, Bob	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Patten, Richard	

The Speaker: All those against, please rise and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Jackson, Cameron	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Chudleigh, Ted	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Martel, Shelley	Scott, Laurie
Flaherty, Jim	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hampton, Howard	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Murdoch, Bill	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 53; the nays are 23.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to acknowledge some people in the gallery who have come today to hear them, including David Kelly, executive director of the Ontario Federation of Community Mental Health and Addiction Programs; Patricia Bregman and Peter Coleridge, representatives of the Canadian Mental Health Association; and Mike McClintock, vice-president of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, in the east members' gallery.

I'm pleased to rise in the House to tell you today that the McGuinty government is taking action in an area of health care that has been neglected for far too long in this province: community-based mental health services. That means a system that gives people across the province enhanced health services in their communities, because we believe that the best health care is found as close to home as possible.

What we are building in Ontario is a responsive, accountable, accessible health care system that serves the needs of Ontarians. To deliver on this plan, we are restoring and fortifying the essential health services that Ontarians need. We are using our precious health care resources in the best possible way to deliver the best possible results. Our strategy is to drive vital health resources down into communities where they can do the most good, and that embraces all aspects of health care, including mental health services.

For a long time there has been a stigma around the issue of mental illness, and that has created a wall between people and the care that they need. Twenty per cent of Canadians will personally experience mental illness in their lifetime. It touches most families; it has certainly touched mine. The economic cost of mental illness in Canada was estimated to be over $8 billion in 1998.

1400

Our government believes that it is crucial that people who are mentally ill receive care in their communities from people they know and can trust. Today I'm pleased to inform Ontarians that the McGuinty government is making a record investment in community mental health. It is an investment that is going to have a major impact on the way this care is provided for Ontarians who need it. That's because we have committed an additional $185 million in new annual funding over four years, for a total investment of $583 million in these crucial services by 2007-08.

Our government is reaching out a caring hand to Ontarians with mental illness and expanding services where they are needed. That is because we know that community-based mental health care is more therapeutically effective and more cost-effective. Community-based mental health care keeps people out of hospitals and jails, leaving both institutions to focus on those with more pressing needs.

This investment will help relieve some of the stress that many families face in caring for loved ones with mental illnesses. Our over half-billion-dollar total investment will help relieve some of the stress that many families face in caring for loved ones with mental illnesses. This will come as a helping hand to families and communities.

I want to take a moment to tell you about some of the particulars of our commitment to community-based mental health care in Ontario.

Our investment will result in expanded case management for people living with mental illnesses. Case management provides a vital anchor to people coping with mental illness. This involves a team of mental health professionals who build a trusting and respectful relationship with the patient and help that individual negotiate through a complicated system to ensure they get the care and support they need.

This funding will also expand crisis response services. These services come to the assistance of individuals who are in acute distress. They include telephone crisis lines and mobile outreach teams that are rapidly deployed to individuals in times of need.

We are also funding more early intervention programs. We know that the earlier a person with mental illness is diagnosed and assisted, the better their chances of recovery.

I am also very pleased to announce that our government will be providing a base funding increase to stabilize the capacity of community mental health agencies in communities all across the province—the first such increase in 12 years.

The public has a significant need for up-to-date and accessible information on mental health resources. The Ontario Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment—DART, as it has become known—has come forward with a proposal for a provincial mental health registry. I am very pleased to announce that we are responding to this innovative proposal and will be funding the creation of the Ontario mental health services registry. This registry will be a one-stop portal for information about mental health services. Information can be accessed 24/7 through a toll-free line, staffed by professionals, as well as on-line services. Part of this funding will go toward improving coordination and collaboration with other ministries and the police to better service the needs of mentally ill people who have been convicted of crimes or are involved with the criminal justice system.

More than 78,000 Ontarians—our friends, family members and neighbours—are suffering from mental illness. They will benefit directly from the expansion of these services.

We know that investment in community-based mental health services has proven to be a cost-effective use of health care dollars. We know that the mental health community is behind us as we make this commitment. I can offer the following quotes from members of the mental health care community as proof that our commitment to community-based mental health services will be an effective one.

From Dr Barbara Everett, CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association: "Funding for mental health and addiction services is an excellent investment by the government. Community mental health and addiction services save money by relieving pressure on more expensive services. Research has shown that they reduce hospitalizations by 86% and emergency room visits by 60%."

Dr Paul Garfinkel, president and CEO of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, offered this support: "Mental health and addiction services have long been the orphan of the health system. With the pressures this government faced given the province's deficit situation, we applaud the McGuinty government for their forward-thinking investment in services, as well as the desperately needed increases in income supports. These investments will help some of Ontario's most vulnerable people—those with mental health and addiction problems."

David Kelly, executive director of the Ontario Federation of Community Mental Health and Addiction Programs, offered this comment on our government's plan of action: "This is a great first step in solving this province's mental health and addiction problems. The McGuinty government can be congratulated for recognizing the need to build community-based mental health and addiction services. After 12 years, there is now renewed hope for these services in Ontario."

That is a remarkable display of solidarity in the community-based mental health sector.

Our plan of action on community mental health is going to make a very real difference for the 78,000 Ontarians in need of these services. Our government is committed to a more accessible, responsive health care system in this province because we want all Ontarians to lead healthier lives. The funding increases I have spoken about today are a very real, tangible way that we're going to work together to meet that goal.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): First of all, on behalf of our caucus and, I dare say, all members of the House, we welcome new funding that goes into mental health services in this province, especially community-based mental health services. It's worthy of note that today's announcement is a multi-year commitment of $185 million, which is less than the commitments that were made in the previous budget in this area.

Hon Mr Smitherman: Annual—$185 million.

Mr Jackson: I understand how to read your press release.

The minister has raised quite a few questions with his statement in the House today. First of all, is he acknowledging that this includes some of the children's mental health services dollars? Does it include recognition of the fact that domiciliary hostel funding in this province is at a meagre $40 per day compared to individuals in our corrections institutions who are funded at $140 a day? The domiciliary hostel funding program, Minister, as you well know, is a significant safety net for mental health patients in our province and, as such, we would hope they are included in your plans and your announcement today, although I do not see any evidence of that. These are front-line residential and program supports on a daily basis for thousands and thousands of mental health patients in our province.

You talk about coordinating services and helping navigate the system. We'd like to know how much of this is actual new money or is part of the federal homeless funding initiative that deals with mental health issues. How much of this has to do with the large increase in

lottery revenues that your government is experiencing this year, which forms part of the funding that assists persons with addictions?

I'd also like to comment that, as you shorted our hospitals in this province to 3.4%, the minister, with his experience, will know that one of the first programs to suffer when hospitals run deficits is their community mental health and mental health programs. I've seen anecdotal evidence of that. Therefore, the importance of this announcement cannot be understated, but it is also part of a significant area that affects our hospitals as well. There's no comment in today's announcement about that.

Finally, as I indicated earlier, we're anxious to determine just how much of a commitment this government will be making to children's mental health services as part of this issue. This is hard for us to reconcile when we consider the fact that children's aid societies have been red-circled by your budget in terms of their budget. There is no increase projected for that.

The school boards—

Interjection.

Mr Jackson: We paid all their back deficits as well. You've red-circled children's aid societies at fewer dollars this year than last year. The Minister for Children and Youth Services may be upset—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Could you allow the member from Burlington to finish his response?

Mr Jackson: There's a lot of latent anxiety over there in the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

The fact of the matter is that children's aid societies have been red-circled this year and they are struggling with their budgets right at this time of the year. They certainly are receiving more children into their care, more children at risk who are involved with families where mental health problems not only affect the parents but also their children.

School boards as well have not seen the kinds of increases this year for their special ed programs, again, where school boards have to cope with an increased number of complex cases of children and their needs.

1410

We welcome the new funding for community-based mental health services. There's no question that these services require a significant expansion. We will be anxious to look in more detail as to where the funding is coming from, and more directly where the funding is going.

We'll be anxiously waiting for confirmation that you are including support for domiciliary hostels in this province, that they have not had the increase they're due. They are almost exclusively assisting persons with mental health to find accommodation they would otherwise be unable to find in this province. So that first line of defence for mental health needs the support of this government.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I want to begin with a mental health issue that I remain most concerned with, that's closest to me because it affects our community and one that I do not think is resolved by the announcement today. That's the deficit at the Northeast Mental Health Centre, a $2.3-million deficit that is going to cause a crisis for that centre and a crisis for children and adults who receive mental health services right across northeastern Ontario.

I first raised this issue with both the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the Minister of Health at the end of February, in letters to them urging them to intervene with this situation, to deal with the program cuts that were proposed. Here we are, mid-June, having had an announcement with respect to children's mental health, and now an announcement with respect to adult mental health, and still not an indication that this very serious problem is going to be resolved. I want to point out to members again just what is at stake if these two government ministries don't deal with this serious issue.

The cuts to children's programs include the following: the cancellation of mental health services for children aged 0-6 living in Sudbury district east, Espanola and Manitoulin Island; the cancellation of mental health support for children living in CAS foster homes; the cancellation of the district day treatment program that helps secondary school students who are fighting addictions to finish high school; services for children who are duly diagnosed with mental and developmental disabilities will be reduced; and the waiting list for preschool speech and language services is going to grow from eight months to a year.

On the adult side, the consequences are: Adults are going to lose their community-based programs in Elliot Lake and Walden; counselling services will be reduced elsewhere in Manitoulin-Sudbury; wait times will grow for seriously ill patients needing help from the ACT teams; and nine acute care beds on the hospital side of the operation will be left empty by the end of the fiscal year 2004-05, even though they are desperately needed.

I look at the announcement today, which is a global announcement, which doesn't indicate how much each individual agency is going to get, and say to this government, you cannot not act any longer. The unions have already been advised of the layoff notices. People are looking for other work. Patients with mental illness, who are already very vulnerable, are being put at even greater risk because of their concern about the services that are going to be lost.

I urge this government to finally sit down with this centre, with the staff, and come up with the $2.3 million that is necessary for this mental health agency to stave off the cuts, stave off the layoffs and ensure that children and adults in northeastern Ontario can get access to the mental health services they need.

Let me deal with three other problems with respect to this announcement. I said earlier, and I'll repeat, that this is a global announcement of $65 million this year. Agencies do not know what their allocation will be. We do not know what the percentage increase for each of those agencies will be. That's very important. If it's only a 2% increase to base funding this year, I can tell you

that's not going to do anything to solve the problem at the Northeast Mental Health Centre. Frankly, it's probably not going to do much to solve problems at other community-based agencies that have been desperate to try to retain their staff when those programs were underfunded.

If it's only a 2% increase, I can tell you that agencies will not be developing and delivering new programs. They will probably not even be hiring new staff. They will probably just be using the 2% increase to hang on to the staff they have and to pay their utility bills. We need to know, and those agencies need to know, if that is the situation. We're not going to do anything to deal with the serious problem of wait lists either if the percentage increase this year is only at 2% or 3%.

The second problem with this is, does it involve addictions agencies as well? I looked very carefully at the statement and I looked at the press release that was announced today. There is no reference at all to addictions agencies, those that provide community services. We know that those addictions services agencies and mental health agencies work hand in hand. Those agencies haven't had an increase in a long time. They are losing their staff as well. They have wait lists, and they need more than a 2% increase this year as well in order to survive. But we need this government to make an announcement that this money also applies to addictions agencies.

Third, where is the supportive housing component? The government was very clear in its election promise that they were going to significantly increase supportive housing options for those suffering from mental illness. There was not a word about that in today's announcement despite the fact that all nine task force reports noted the need for that, despite the fact that all the most recent research that has been put forward shows clearly that when people have supportive housing when they are chronically ill, they will stabilize in a stable environment.

Finally, we need announcements with respect to huge children's mental health waiting lists. The minister needs to make announcements in those fields as well.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Premier. When you were seeking office last year, you promised the voters of Ontario that you would not raise their taxes, that you would hold the line on taxes. Then, in the provincial budget you imposed an OHIP tax on all the people of Ontario. Well, the people of Ontario have had an opportunity to consider your broken promises: Provincial support for McGuinty's Liberal government plummets to 32%; Conservatives now lead at 39%. In fact, seven in 10 Ontarians, according to this morning's Ipsos-Reid poll, believe the budget is bad news.

Given the overwhelming anger of the voters in Ontario, of the taxpayers in Ontario to your betrayal, to your breach of your promise to them, and their desire for change in the budget, is your government considering reversing its decision to impose the health care tax on the people of Ontario?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): No, of course we are not considering doing any such thing. But let me just take the opportunity to say that we welcome the entry of John Tory into the debate about the misinformation that was released prior to the last provincial election, when the government members insisted that the budget was balanced. We all learned, to our dismay and chagrin, that they were hiding a $5.6-billion deficit. I'm with John Tory, when it comes to this particular matter, who says that it's time for their party to admit that they in fact hid a $5.6-billion deficit from the people of Ontario.

Mr Flaherty: I welcome the Premier's comments. I'm not sure if John Tory will welcome them or not, but those are the comments of our Liberal Premier.

You say you're not considering changing the tax. Your health minister, in the Toronto Star, is talking about a health account to give Ontario taxpayers back some of the money that the government was going to take away from them in the health care tax—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. This is just the first supplementary and we have had a lot of shouting on the other side. I'd like to hear the member for Whitby-Ajax put his supplementary.

Mr Flaherty: Thanks, Speaker.

Not only is the health minister talking about changing the tax; the MPP for Niagara Falls, Kim Craitor, is quoted in the Niagara Falls Review as stating that he is lobbying his own government to reverse its decision. Mr McMeekin, Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot: "I heard about the potential delisting of health services. I asked that that not happen."

It certainly sounds, Premier, like there are discussions in the backbench, and in one case the minister of health himself, indicating that you are discussing reversing your decision with respect to imposing this unwelcome tax on the people of Ontario, a tax that you promised you would not impose when you were seeking their votes. Are you not having those discussions—

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'll take the opportunity to remind the honourable member opposite and the good people of Ontario about some of the contrasts between this, our first budget, and their very first budget. In their first budget—and I know they're very proud of this—they cut welfare spending by 22%, they fired one third of the Ministry of the Environment staff, they slashed education funding by $400 million, they cut $400 million from colleges and universities, and they took $552 million from our municipalities.

There's no doubt about it: We've decided to invest in better quality public services for the people of Ontario.

That's the difference between our budget and their budget.

1420

Mr Flaherty: What we haven't seen is an investment in political integrity; that is, when you make a promise to voters in Ontario, you keep the promise. That's character education, Premier, and another one of your problems.

It's not just your backbench MPPs; it's not just your health minister; it's you yourself—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Community and Social Services and the Minister of Health, could you come to order?

Member from Whitby-Ajax.

Mr Flaherty: It's not just your health minister, it's not just backbench MPPs who are saying you should change the tax; it's you yourself. Osprey News reported, "Ontario's Liberal government will consider modifying a controversial health care premium introduced in last month's budget, Premier Dalton McGuinty said in an interview with Osprey News on Thursday.

This is only Monday. That's only a few days ago. Surely you remember what you said on Thursday to the reporter, that you're thinking about making changes to this unpopular health care tax.

Let me suggest a change to you: Get rid of it. You promised you would not increase taxes in Ontario. The only thing less popular than your government is this Liberal tax, and the only person less popular than your government is you, at 9% in the polls. Do the right thing: Repeal the tax.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Personally, I've always thought popularity was a bad thing, and so far I've managed to avoid it.

I'll tell you what people are concerned about. They're concerned very much about the fact that a $5.6-billion deficit was hidden from view when we went into the last election campaign. In fact, the quarterly financial statement—the quarterly update, as they called it—specifically said that the books were balanced, that there was no deficit.

What we intend to do for and on behalf of the people of Ontario is, by means of our Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, ensure that before each and every ensuing provincial election the people of Ontario will know exactly what the state of our financial affairs is, so that never again will what happened at the time of the last election ever be perpetrated on the people of Ontario.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. You're absolutely right. I think you're right that the people of this province will ensure that never again will happen what happened in the last provincial election; that is, that they believe you, because they can't believe you.

The fact is that last week's poll said that only 9% of people in this province believe anything you say—9%, Premier. This week's poll tells us that seven out of 10 people think you brought in a bad budget. One third of Ontarians are saying that they're going to punish the federal Liberals for what you've done in this province, and we're looking forward to that.

We have observers here from another country. Surely they have never experienced the kind of deceit in their elections that has taken place—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'll ask the member from Oak Ridges to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Mr Klees: I'll withdraw that. If I might—

The Speaker: You've completed your question. Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'm sure that the member is very much supportive of those parts of our budget that would do the following: shorten wait times by creating 36,000 more cardiac procedures, 2,300 more joint replacements, 9,000 more cataract surgeries, 8,000 more full-time nursing positions, and 78,600 more Ontarians receiving mental health support in their communities.

We think those are good things to do. They're not easy things to do, but they're important things to do, and we are committed to doing them by means of this budget.

Mr Klees: The Premier doesn't get it. What the people of Ontario don't think is a good thing to do is promise one thing in an election campaign and then break every promise you make to people once you're in office. That's what the people of Ontario object to. What the folks who are observing us here may not know is that in this province we have a law, brought in by the previous government, that before you bring in a tax increase, you have to have a referendum by the people of Ontario. Not only did you promise not to increase taxes; you've broken the law in this province by not having a referendum. Will you at least stand in your place and say we will have a referendum to do what you said you weren't going to do? Will you stand in your place and do that today?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Well, I think the law that the member is referring to is called the taxpayer protection act. That would be the same law that he and his colleagues broke in this very Legislature by amending that same law, without a referendum.

Also, because they did not balance their last budget, they stand in abrogation of the balanced budget legislation. There's a consequence connected with that, and that is to give up 25% of your salary. I'll be asking the member to stand in his place now and tell the good people of Ontario why it is that, in the face of breaking that particular law, the balanced budget legislation, he has yet to send over a cheque payable to the treasury of the province of Ontario in the amount of $9,000.

Mr Klees: I cannot believe the Premier walked into this one. The fact of the matter is, Premier, you had six months to balance the budget. I stood in this place and asked you at least 25 different times: What have you done? Have you instructed your Minister of Finance to balance the budget in the months that you have left to do

so? Not once did you answer the question. You, sir, had the opportunity to balance that budget, as we would have. You didn't, and now you're increasing taxes to the people of Ontario. Will you at least do it legally and have a referendum according to the law of this province? Why won't you do that? Why do you continue to spin further untruths in this place?

The Speaker: You know the unparliamentary word, and I would ask you to withdraw.

Mr Klees: I'll withdraw that, but you know—

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, we brought a very different approach to dealing with our financial mess left to us by the Tory government. It's true that in order to balance the budget this year and deal with their $6-billion deficit, we could have shut down our entire community college system, and that would have saved us $800 million. We could have shut down 10 hospitals; that would have saved us about $1 billion. We could have fired 16,500 teachers, and that would have saved us about $1 billion. We could have done what the Tories did and reduced welfare by a further 22%. We could have cut again at the Ministry of the Environment, with ensuing dire consequences in the community of Walkerton. But we chose a different path. We didn't choose an easy path, but we chose the right path. We chose to make investments in better health care and better education because we believe that's in the interests of the people of Ontario, and we're proud of that.

1430

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. I want to read from your radio ad. It goes like this: "I'm Dalton McGuinty, and I want you to know that every penny of Ontario's new health premium will go to health care."

Then we turn to page 44 of your budget, and what do we find? We find things like sewer and water projects being counted as health care services. In fact, $113 million of what you call health care services is in fact sewer and water construction. When are you going to explain this to the people of Ontario? Under the McGuinty government, when did sewer pipes become a health service?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'm pleased that the leader of the third party has now taken the opportunity to take a look at the budget. This is hardly a secret. It was part of the budget that we put out several weeks ago. You'll see, on page 43 and thereafter, we list the investments that we are going to make in order to—it says, "Investments for Healthier Ontarians." I'm sure that my friend opposite understands the concept of broader determinants of health, which medical experts have been speaking to for many, many years. For example, earlier today, the Minister of Health talked about the investments that we're making in community-based programs, including those that will serve children at risk. Technically, that money does not flow through the Ministry of Health; it will flow through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, I'd like you to come to order.

Mr Hampton: Premier, these are your words: "I promise you that every penny of Ontario's new health premium will go to health care."

I think what people across Ontario want to know is this: People who need the health care services of a chiropractor are now told, despite the McGuinty health tax, that a chiropractor is no longer a health care service covered by OHIP in Ontario. People who need to have their eyes checked by an eye doctor are told that under the McGuinty government, despite the new health tax, the services of an optometrist are no longer a health care service covered by OHIP. But if you look at your budget, sewer pipe is now, according to you, a health care service. Can you tell me: Why is health care money now going for sewer pipes, but people are told that chiropractors and optometrists no longer provide health care services?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite doesn't believe or doesn't understand that clean and safe drinking water is a prerequisite to good health in Ontario. He might want to review Mr Justice Dennis O'Connor's report arising from the Walkerton inquiry, where seven people lost their lives as a result of drinking dangerous water. We are not going to apologize for investing in safe and clean drinking water—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm going to warn the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. The next time I'm going to be naming you. I also caution the member for Simcoe North.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite may not believe that safe and clean drinking water is a prerequisite to good health in Ontario, but I want to commit to him, and to his constituents in particular, that we will not apologize for doing whatever we can to invest in the better health care of all Ontarians by ensuring they have safe and clean drinking water.

Mr Hampton: I know enough that sewer pipe is not a health care service.

I also want to read your ad again.

Interjections.

Mr Hampton: If I can speak over the Minister of Health, I'd like to—Dalton McGuinty says—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm going to ask the Minister of Health—I'm going to warn you. The next time I may have to name you.

Mr Hampton: There's another problem with your ad. It makes the promise that every penny from the new health care premium will go to health care, and then you say, "meningitis vaccinations for children." Your Minister of Health had to retreat on that last week,

because the health care premium is not going to pay for vaccinations. We already discovered that $156 million is coming from the federal government as part of a national program of immunization. We know that vaccinations are paid for by the federal government. Why are you trying to claim that the new health tax is paying for vaccinations? That doesn't seem to be true either.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I don't know why it is that the member opposite is so opposed to improving the quality of health care for the people of Ontario. I don't know what he has against vaccinations for our children. I don't know what he has against quicker and more readily available cataract surgeries, hip and knee replacements, cardiac surgeries, more chemotherapy and more radiation. The member opposite apparently does not support those kinds of initiatives, but we on this side of the House feel we've got a responsibility to move forward in that direction and we will continue to do so.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: I simply want people to know what's actually happening here. The new health tax isn't paying for vaccinations. That's coming from the federal government. And the new health tax isn't going to pay—

The Speaker: Order. The question is to?

Mr Hampton: Oh, to the Premier, of course.

The new health tax is not going to cover people when they need to see a chiropractor or an optometrist, but it's going to cover sewer pipe, according to your budget.

Let me tell you what I think really happened here. After you made the decision to impose the health tax, you suddenly discovered you were about $200 million short in health services, so you sent out the communication gurus and said, "Try to find $200 million more that we can somehow relate to health spending." That's how sewer pipe, according to your government, became a health care service, isn't it, Premier? Your health care spending didn't match up with the new health tax so you had to start counting sewer pipe as a health care service.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member is wrong again. If he was so committed to ensuring that there were sufficient resources available for absolutely essential investments in better quality education and health care, then I ask him, why did he vote against Bill 2? Why did he vote against rolling back the corporate tax cuts? Why did he vote against eliminating the seniors' education property tax credit? Why did he vote against scrapping the private school tax credit? Why did he vote against taking the first step toward raising the tobacco tax to the national average? If he is so dedicated, not only on behalf of his constituents but to all Ontarians, why is it that he stood four-square in the way of making the necessary tough decisions to ensure we had the money that was essential to investing in better health care and better education?

Mr Hampton: Premier, it would help the people at home if you'd simply answer the question.

Let me give you another example. One of the things you list as a health service in your budget is money that's going to the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation for something called Active 2010. When we called the communications officials, they said, "Well, this is going to be like the Participaction TV ads that people used to see." What it amounts to is this: People are now going to see television ads telling them, yes, they should be more active—I think most people probably know they should be more active—but do you really expect people to believe that that's a health care service, that running TV ads telling people, "You should do this, you should do that,"—do you really expect that is a health care service?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I have no idea where the member is getting his information, but I can tell you one thing: It is simply not reliable.

I want to drag him kicking and screaming out of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 21st century and impress upon him that we can't continue to fund health care in the ways that we have in the past. It's time for us to go a little bit more upstream and invest in those kinds of things that ensure that we have a healthier, more active population. We should have done that years ago. Public health administrators have been pleading for us to do that very kind of thing. We look forward to talking more about our particular program, to make sure that more Ontarians are taking a greater interest in leading active, healthy lives.

Mr Hampton: The Premier wants to know where my information comes from. Here it is, page 44 of your budget, at the bottom: Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Active 2010 program. Underneath, it says that to ensure there will be funding for this, the government proposes to introduce a health premium.

I simply say to you, how is it that sewer pipe is now counted by your government as a health service, that television ads run by the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, according to your government, are now a health service, but things like seeing a chiropractor, being able to see the optometrist to have your eyes checked, being able to see a physiotherapist when you have a chronic condition with your shoulder or your back or your knee—none of that is now counted as a health service in Ontario. You are the one who said all the money was going to go to health services. How can it be going to sewer pipe and television ads?

1440

Hon Mr McGuinty: Never has so much misinformation been conveyed within a single statement as we've just had the painful experience moments ago in this Legislature.

Just to convey a few facts—because from time to time I think they are helpful to us—the premium is raising $1.6 billion this year, yet we are increasing health care expenditures by $2.4 billion. So we're going as far as we can to make absolutely essential investments.

Again, what we are talking about are the fundamentals. I'm talking about more cardiac procedures, more joint replacements, more chemotherapy, more radiation, more full-time nurses, more full-time doctors, and family health teams. We think that, together, makes up a modern

infrastructure for the delivery of health care at the beginning of the 21st century.

The member opposite can spin and turn in his place as much as he would like, but at the end of the day the people of Ontario are going to experience better quality health care and better care for themselves.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is to the Premier as well. I've listened to you in the House today talk about defending the new order for health care that will provide funding for sewer lines. I want you to stand in your place today and make as strong a commitment to cancer sufferers in this province, an increasing number of whom are going to Buffalo and Rochester to get treatments that other Canadians currently receive.

Last Thursday, I referenced to you the new drug funding program and that your government has put a $60.7-million hard cap on their program. There is a 4% growth in the number of cancer patients requiring life-saving and life-palliating treatments, and yet you persist in putting on this hard cap. You referenced last week that there was another $60.7 million. The same amount that they were given last year is just what they are getting this year for a disease that is on a rampant increase.

Premier, on January 28, only four months into your mandate, you put in the cut. I'm asking you again, will you lift the hard cap on the new drug funding program for Cancer Care Ontario and try to save some additional lives in Ontario?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Minister of Health.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I appreciate the opportunity to correct a lot of the misinformation that the honourable member has very deliberately and wilfully been presenting on this issue.

There is no such thing as a hard cap. There is a printed budget number, and the reality is that on a variety of programs in the Ministry of Health—as the member will well know as a sometime cabinet minister in the previous government—as some programs come under considerable pressure and new discoveries in terms of drugs are brought on-line promptly, there are always in-year adjustments to the funding for cancer drugs.

The assurance that the member is looking for is an assurance I am very pleased to provide, and it is this: This government will stand behind a program that is designed to make sure that the people of Ontario struggling against the—

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Weasel words.

Hon Mr Smitherman: That member calls it "weasel words." To give an answer in this House that says that we will as a province stand behind those people who have cancer by ensuring that the best, most reliable, effective and available drugs are there to help people in those crisis times is the commitment of this government. Those aren't weasel words, but you'd know a weasel word, wouldn't you?

Mr Jackson: Premier, your minister can stand in the House and say that he is committed, but the fact of the matter is that an increasing number of Ontario residents are not gaining access to cancer treatment in this province under your watch as Premier. That is a fact. For the first time in Cancer Care Ontario's history, we've witnessed the delisting of life-saving drugs and the denial of life-saving drugs in this province under your watch as Premier.

I brought in the issue of Rituximab, which prolongs progression-free survival of patients with advanced non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In New Brunswick, PEI, Saskatchewan and BC, citizens get this drug. They don't in Ontario. Yet in BC, the clinical evidence is clear. It results in 58% fewer deaths from this disease.

I ask you once again: Are you prepared to lift the hard cap, or the budget—you can call it what you like, but Cancer Care Ontario has withdrawn these drugs for the first time in our province's history. Will you save these lives, lift the cap and make the commitment instead of talking about all these extracurricular things you talk about?

Hon Mr Smitherman: The first thing the member needs to know: Any decisions that were taken, were taken by Cancer Care Ontario, with no direction or involvement from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. In one case, officials at Cancer Care Ontario put a drug on the formulary list which is provided to hospitals, even though it hadn't come through their board. They might have made some effort to correct that. They did so with no direction whatsoever from the Ministry of Health.

On the issue at hand, which is about the member continuing to raise this idea of a hard cap, there is no such thing. The fact of the matter is, we've clearly conveyed to our partners at Cancer Care Ontario that this Minister of Health and this government will always work with Cancer Care Ontario to make sure that the best, most efficacious drugs are available to the people of the province of Ontario.

The member will well know—and should be reminded, though—that we depend on expert advice around these things. We look to the Ontario drug quality therapeutics committee to provide some evidence around the efficacious nature of drugs. I repeat the essential message here, which is: That member needs to cease and desist from the suggestion to the people of the province of Ontario that there is any hard cap on the amount we will spend to help people to stay alive if they're fighting cancer in our province, because that is a fundamental contribution—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Premier. During the election you promised there would be no cuts to health care. Then after the election, and with your budget, you cut essential health care

services like eye exams, physiotherapy and chiropractic services.

If that wasn't enough, it appears that you're prepared to make even more cuts to health care services. In a media interview on Friday, "McGuinty raised the prospect that the government may consider dropping other services from medicare."

What else did you intend to cut, and how does that compare with the election promise that you made not to cut health care services?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to remind the member opposite that we're proud of putting an additional $2.4 billion into health care in the province as a result of this particular budget. That may come as bad news to the member opposite, but we think it's good news on this side of the House.

Did we make some difficult decisions with respect to those services that we think we can no longer afford to provide? You bet we did, but those are the kinds of decisions that we're going to have to make from time to time. We've been very progressive and balanced in terms of who is going to able to get optometry services, chiropractic services and the like. The important point we are making is that this year, as a result of this budget, we are providing more than $2 billion in additional health care services for the people of Ontario.

Ms Martel: May I remind you of your election promise, which was that you were not going to cut health care services? You see, when you cut access to OHIP-funded services, it means that those who can afford to, pay for care buy quality care, and those who can't, just do without. You and your government are contributing directly to two-tier health in Ontario, despite all the rhetoric in the election and despite all the rhetoric with respect to Bill 8.

Eye exams, physiotherapy and chiropractic services are essential health care services. They should continue to be covered under OHIP.

I ask you again, very specifically: What other cuts to health care do you intend to make? How does that compare with your very specific election promise, that being "no cuts to health care"?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member will know that the services we have delisted are not deemed to be essential under the Canada Health Act. What motivated us to do that was the same thing that motivated the NDP government to delist the following formerly insured services: acne removal, tattoos, skin lesions, varicose veins, reversals of vasectomies, tubal ligations, routine circumcision, and many, many more. They used to be covered before the NDP decided they were going to delist those kinds things. Just so we're clear about delisting and who has done what, they have done more than their share of it.

1450

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a question for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade about an issue that is so important to my own riding of Oakville as home of Ford of Canada. It's a question about the automotive sector.

Today in Niagara, the Paul Martin Liberal government announced $500 million over five years for the auto sector. Last April, Premier McGuinty and yourself announced the Ontario automotive investment strategy, which was another $500 million over five years for the auto sector.

Minister, how does your strategy differ from the one the federal Liberals announced, and what do you think this will mean for the auto sector in Ontario?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): Let me thank the member for the question. Today's announcement means great news for Ontario's auto sector. It's good news for Ontario's economy. It means the federal Liberals get it; they understand the auto sector is vital to Ontario's economy. In fact, they realize we're facing unprecedented competition south of the border, and they are investing in the auto sector and matching what the Ontario automotive investment strategy is all about.

They are investing in key areas: skills training, energy efficiencies, environmental technologies, public infrastructure and innovation. These are essential legacy commitments that we've made in the Ontario automotive investment strategy, and the federal government is matching those because they recognize the vitality necessary for the auto sector to move ahead and be competitive in the world.

Mr Flynn: Last week we all heard Mr Stephen Harper, while unveiling his corporate policy, refuse to invest in the auto sector. He would simply focus on tax cuts. That policy, or lack of policy, is incredibly short-sighted and neglects Ontario's auto industry. It appears Mr Harper does not want good, high-paying, high-value jobs or skills upgrades for Ontarians, and would rather export those jobs to the southern US. For every one job created in an assembly plant, eight more are created in the community. What do you think Mr Harper has against Ontario and Oakville's economic prosperity?

Hon Mr Cordiano: Mr Harper wants to impose the same Harris-style tax cuts that were imposed on Ontarians and saw 19 new plants located in North America, but not one of them come to Ontario. That has been rejected. Those are failed policies.

I want to quote from Christina Blizzard, who wrote in the Toronto Sun—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Those members in the front row here—the member for Leeds-Grenville and the member for Nepean-Carleton—I'm going to ask you to come to order.

Hon Mr Cordiano: I want to quote from Christina Blizzard from the Toronto Sun, who said: "Sometimes you need to invest in an industry if you want to keep jobs in this province. You can't hold your biggest industry hostage to political ideology."

Let me say to the member from Nepean, who is the co-campaign chairman for the federal Conservatives: Get

on the phone now to Mr Harper and tell him in no uncertain terms that he should support Ontario's auto investment strategy. He should come to the table with a similar strategy and show some support for Ontario's important automotive sector, show that he cares about Ontario. Will you do that?

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Minister of Education, and it concerns some of the most vulnerable people in the province of Ontario: children with special needs. A promise made by the government when they were seeking office was, "We will help the children who need the most help, those with special needs."

In fact, the minister has announced holding back a promised $102 million in approved special-ed funding. It was confirmed by the MPP for Kitchener Centre to the Star on June 9 that Mr Kennedy ordered a hold on these payments. One of the consequences of this is the inability of school boards to plan for the fall semester, the fall school year. We are now almost in the middle of June. The chair of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board's special education advisory committee said, "The government's holdback of special education funding is a recipe for even more instability to the lives of our special-needs students." Minister, why are you breaking your promise to special-needs students in Ontario?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I find it not just passing strange but almost bordering on the ridiculous that this member opposite, representing the government that subjected vulnerable children in this province to not one year, not two years but four years of delay to provide for them any of the supports that they require, had to be forced, with their backs against the wall and Dr Rozanski's metaphorical gun, to give up even a portion of the dollars that were owed.

What we have done, in fact, is release to the people of this province, the parents and students, $63 million this year. We have a system put in place by the last government that needs verification. We're working with the boards. I'll give you the assurance that we, distinct from that government, will make sure that every single special-needs student in this province receives the help they require. We're doing that in a way the member opposite wouldn't recognize: co-operatively, working with the boards and making sure those students finally get the help they deserve.

Mr Flaherty: I'm sure there's no comfort taken by special-needs parents in the province of Ontario to that kind of partisan attack. When you're a parent of a special-needs child, Minister, you need to have the assurance that your child will be taken care of in the fall, when the child goes to school.

You're creating instability in the school system, as confirmed by the chair of the committee in Waterloo. More than that, they've already started layoffs. Now we have special assistants who are working with children with special needs in the province being laid off as a result of your holdback of funding for them. This is happening in Brant-Haldimand, where notices have already been sent out in the Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk Catholic District School Board, cutting services to special-needs students for the autumn of this year. Shame on you. Get the funding out the door for these children with special needs in the province. Enough of the partisan nonsense; get the money out.

Hon Mr Kennedy: I'll take no instruction from the member opposite on how to have regard for these same kids who lost four years in their education system, thanks to him.

I would say to all the people watching that—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr Flaherty: You should be ashamed. Get the money out to the kids.

The Speaker: Order, member from Whitby-Ajax.

Minister.

Hon Mr Kennedy: While the member opposite would relegate his responsibilities as a member of this House to fearmonger—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. I'm going to warn the member from Whitby-Ajax.

Hon Mr Kennedy: He would relegate his responsibilities to these vulnerable families, and what he should do instead is repeat what every board in this province is now aware of: that no layoffs will take place that will affect children whatsoever; that legal notices, once budgets are filed, will be rescinded. In fact, anyone who stands in their place in this House and tries to say that a child's future is in jeopardy because of this is putting their political advancement ahead of the needs of those kids.

It is finally time in this province to arrive at a consensus in this House that those children will receive our penultimate attention and that the dollars they deserve will be there.

HYDRO DEREGULATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Bay Street's major law firms are licking their chops over your new private hydro scheme. They want to skim a fair amount of money off the top of what they believe could be $40 billion worth of new business. That's big money. It also means huge increases in hydro rates after you've already increased hydro rates twice, after saying you would freeze them.

Could you tell us, Premier, why you're adopting the Mike Harris plan to enrich your friends on Bay Street and why you're going to make the average consumer across Ontario pay for their enrichment?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): We're not adopting the previous government's plan, nor are we adopting the first choice of the leader of the third party. We're bringing a balanced, pragmatic, responsible approach to deal with our generation needs.

I want to remind the member opposite that he, on his watch, raised hydro rates on behalf of the good people of Ontario by 40%. We're taking a balanced, responsible approach, and we look forward to delivering on that.

1500

Mr Hampton: I just want to read you a letter. This is a letter of October 31, 2001, sent by Dalton McGuinty to the private energy sector. It says, "Throughout Ontario's electricity restructuring process, Dalton and the Ontario Liberals have been consistent supporters of the move to an open electricity market in Ontario." Now I want to jump ahead and quote Chris Portner, a partner at Osler, Hoskin and Harcourt, a leading Bay Street firm, who talks about how much money firms like his will make off your new hydro scheme: "It's huge numbers, absolutely staggering numbers," he says.

Those huge, staggering numbers are going to be paid for by working families, the same working families whom you now want to pay for your new health tax. Why are you adopting the Mike Harris hydro agenda and forcing Ontario consumers to pay and pay, and pay again?

Hon Mr McGuinty: If we're going to get into the record, then perhaps the people of Ontario will be interested in the following statements made by my good friend opposite. Mr Hampton said, "There will be important roles for the private sector to play in the future of our electricity system." He went on to say, "I'm not ideologically opposed to private power any more than I'm opposed to private restaurants, clothing stores or car dealerships." He said, "Not sending consumers clear price signals discourages conservation and energy efficiency."

Those are all things said by my friend opposite. Again, notwithstanding his very best efforts to frighten the people of Ontario, in particular the consumers of hydro, we're bringing a balanced and responsible approach.

IMMIGRANTS

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a question for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Recently you signed a letter of intent with the federal government to begin negotiations on a federal-provincial immigration agreement. This is an important and long overdue first step. As I understand, Ontario is the only province that does not have an immigration agreement with the federal government.

For too long, Ontario's immigrants have not received the same attention as immigrants in other provinces because the previous government did not want to, for whatever reason, forge working relationships with other levels of government. However, as you're also aware, Ontario receives many highly educated immigrants who, unfortunately, are unable to find jobs in their chosen professions. In fact, many can't even find a job, can't make a living and, in their desperation, many are driving taxis or delivering pizzas. I'd like to ask the minister, how would this federal-provincial agreement address the problem of immigrants finding jobs?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I'd like to thank the member for the excellent question. He's right, there are far too many foreign-trained professionals being underutilized in this province. The signing of this letter of intent is a major accomplishment, for it is a redefining of the vision of a future immigration and settlement policy in Ontario, something that is a priority for the McGuinty government.

This letter sets us on the path toward achieving better outcomes for newcomers to Ontario and optimizing all the economic and social benefits of immigration. I'm committed to improved processes so there can be a seamless integration of services, a comprehensive one-stop shopping for newcomers and prospective immigrants in accessing settlement supports.

Minister Chambers and I are working earnestly to improve outcomes for newcomers to Ontario and help them gain better access to meaningful employment opportunities. This is just the beginning, but I'm very proud of this achievement. It's historic, and it is the first one that includes municipalities in the federation.

Mr Ruprecht: We made a commitment to the people of Ontario during the election campaign to negotiate an agreement with the federal government to improve support for settlement services and language integration for immigrants. Immigrants enrich Ontario communities and strengthen our economy. I am glad to see that we're moving in a positive direction to helping our newest citizens. One-stop shopping is a great idea.

While our federal government has immigration agreements with many other provinces, I understand that this letter of intent is unique, in that it involves cities and other municipalities. In Ontario alone, about 80% of the over 130,000 newcomers each year settle in the GTA. Another 22,000 immigrants settle in cities such as Hamilton, Ottawa, Windsor, London and the greater Niagara area. Could the minister please tell me, what kind of involvement will cities have in this process?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Fully understanding the impact that municipalities have on immigration, for the first time in Canadian history we consulted with municipalities on the immigration agreement, and in the letter of intent, it's right there that they will be consulted in part of this agreement. In fact, I'm very concerned, with the upcoming federal election, that this and other federal-provincial agreements will be sabotaged, and I tell the people of Ontario to consider this come election day.

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is also to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. A $24-million capital investment in children's treatment centres was included in your budget. This is actually on page 16. They acknowledge that CTCs "help parents obtain and coordinate a range of services for their children with disabilities."

Parents of the approximately 23,000 children with disabilities in Simcoe county and York region are without a children's treatment centre, and 6,000 of the children need multiple rehabilitation services such as speech, physio, and/or occupational therapy. Can you indicate to the House and to the parents of York region and Simcoe county who have children with disabilities that the $24 million includes funding for them?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I will respond to the Simcoe situation in my supplementary. I'd like to reiterate that not only will we be giving $24 million for badly needed capital funding for the treatment centres, but we will also be giving a 3% increase for their base funding as well. We will continue to work with all service providers, including our children's treatment centres, including the community in Simcoe-York on these issues.

Mr Dunlop: Children with disabilities and their families access ongoing rehabilitation services at children's treatment centres everywhere in the province except in Simcoe county and York region. As you know from your previous experience and your previous work, access to these rehabilitation services is considered critical to the optimal development of children with disabilities.

The proposal for a children's integrated rehabilitation service system to deliver these services in Simcoe and York has received internal approvals from the different ministries. That's my understanding. When will the government provide the capital and operational funding to deliver core rehabilitation services to the children and youth in Simcoe county and York region? I reiterate, it's the only area of the province that does not have a children's treatment centre.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I am aware of the Simcoe York District Health Council's proposal for integration of rehabilitation services for children and youth of your county, and I understand the increasing pressures faced with that growing region. In fact, my ministry will be working with the district health council to find solutions. To begin the dialogue, my ministry staff have contacted the health council and they are in the process of setting up a meeting to discuss the proposal. It is an innovative proposal. It deals with the coordination and integration of services, which is the direction we want to go, generally speaking, with children's services in this province. I would like to assure the member that we're taking a very serious look at this issue in your region.

TORONTO POLICE SERVICE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Premier. There's a story in today's Globe and Mail that says Norm Gardner billed $50,000 worth of junkets to Paris and other glamorous places to the Toronto Police Services Board. Former board vice-chair Gloria Lindsay Luby says, "He wouldn't ask for permission to go, he just went. We'd find out about it later, if we found out about it at all."

It's bad enough that Gardner refuses to resign after being suspended, thereby paralyzing the board, but now we find that he's been jetting all over the world at taxpayers' expense, approving these expenses himself. Premier, I've told you before: If you need to pass legislation to get rid of Norm Gardner, let's do it. What are you waiting for?

1510

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Community Safety.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I'm sure the member knows that Mr Gardner was appointed by the previous government, but he was appointed to the police services board as a member only. It's up to the police services board themselves to elect their own chairman, which is what they did. So he serves as chairman because his fellow members elected him chairman.

I'm sure you also know that at the present time, he is under suspension because of a ruling by OCCOPS. He is under suspension until the end of his term, which is in December. What has happened is that because he is appealing that, we have no ability to remove him. Having said all that—I just wanted to give you that as background—the budget of the Toronto Police Services Board is provided by the city. He is accountable to them and to them only.

Ms Churley: It's not a good answer.

Premier, I'm going to come back to you, because that minister gives me the same answer every time, and it's not an appropriate response. You need to take responsibility. It's very clear that Norm Gardner has got to go. Let me say to you, Premier, despite what the minister says: You're the only one now who can do this. Either you're going to live up to your responsibilities, or you can continue not doing it. You have to help get the Toronto Police Services Board back on its feet. I've told you before: If you want to bring in new legislation, we will give it quick passage.

I'm going to ask you again, Premier. I've researched this; I know you can do it. Are you going to continue to wash your hands of this situation, or are you going to finally do something about it?

Hon Mr Kwinter: The member opposite is really extending her sphere of trying to implicate people. She has been trying to get me to abrogate due process, to interfere with due process. Now she's asking the Premier of Ontario to do the same thing.

I can tell you that, notwithstanding that you think this is something that she should do, there is a process. It's called due process. It's under the review of the courts, and there is no minister of the crown—Premier or otherwise—who is going to interfere with that process.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): My question is to the Minister of Education. As you're well aware, for the past number of years, small and rural schools have struggled

to stay open in Ontario. This is due, in large part, to insufficient and flawed funding to help them with their unique circumstances. There are small and rural schools in my riding that are very anxious about their ability to remain open in the near future. Harrow high school, as you know, is one of these. Just recently I had the opportunity to attend the school's 100th anniversary.

Minister, what is our government going to do to ensure that schools like Harrow high in my riding are not threatened with closure in the near future?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I want to reply to the member, who has been a strong advocate for rural schools and indeed for good schools everywhere in this province, that that has become possible because of the commitment of this Premier and this Minister of Finance to an $854-million increase to try to correct some of the skews that have been built into the system that effectively painted a bull's eye on the roofs of small rural schools all around the province regardless of what they did to students, and deleterious to our objective of seeing every student in this province have the same kind of opportunity to go forward.

So we've been able to give the boards more confidence that they can meet their own payrolls. They're not going after rural schools in quite the same fashion. But more than that, we've identified $31 million specifically to help keep good schools open. We're now working with school boards to ensure that that $31 million will help the viability of every rural school in this province. A funny thing happened under the previous government, where only some rural schools were recognized and many others with exactly the same conditions were treated as if they were in the middle of large cities. That will change in the near future.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Could I ask members who are standing between myself and the speaker of the next supplementary question to sit down.

Mr Crozier: I appreciate the fact that it takes time to develop sound and sustainable policies to help keep small and rural schools open. However, in the case of Harrow high school, they don't have much time left before some really tough decisions are going to have to be made. Can you tell me when individual school boards will know what assistance they can expect from our government that specifically addresses the needs of small and rural schools?

Hon Mr Kennedy: The people of Harrow and the people of the rural community in general should know that the member for Essex and members in this House have been fierce in advocating for them to finally be seen on an equal footing. What we want to say to the anxieties that were stoked by the inequities in the funding formula that have made rural schools like Harrow worry year after year is that we're making a different kind of connection with school boards and we're saying these are long-term decisions. Notwithstanding the challenges faced by rural areas, these should not be made in haste. We have given boards until August 30 to make their financial decisions, and we're working with them so that by the end of June they are going to know the kinds of dollars that are coming to them, or at least a very good idea about how they can be applied.

We say to all members in this House, you need to get behind the complexities of this, but these dollars are there. Finally there is a better future for rural students and rural schools in this province.

ANNUAL REPORT, OFFICE OF THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the annual report of the Office of the Integrity Commissioner for the period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004.

ANNUAL REPORT, LOBBYISTS REGISTRATION OFFICE

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I further beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the fifth annual report from the lobbyists registration office, Office of the Integrity Commissioner, with respect to the administration of the Lobbyists Registration Act, 1998, for the period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said that he would not raise taxes; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government has announced in their budget that they are imposing a new tax or premium on health care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government reverse their budget decision to charge an Ontario health premium."

I support this and affix my signature.

TRANSITION BENEFITS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads:

"Yes, Peter Kormos, I agree with you, the Liberal government must enforce our rights for transition benefits.

"Whereas HOOPP is presently funding retirement benefits for those who have less than 20 years of service and are 55 years of age or older;

"Whereas HOOPP is proposing to eliminate the availability of these transition benefits beyond 2005;

"Whereas we, the undersigned, will have in excess of 30 years of service and will not be entitled to these benefits because we have not reached the age of 55;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enforce our rights to receive these transitional funds extended until December 31, 2008."

It's signed by hundreds, and I've signed it as well.

ONTARIO HERITAGE DAY

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned, believe that the people of Ontario deserve a day to celebrate our province's rich history and heritage. We encourage the government to declare the second Monday in June as Ontario Heritage Day, the ninth provincial statutory holiday."

I affix my signature.

TAXATION

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the taxpayer protection law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11, 2003, not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised in TV ads not to raise taxes by one penny on working families; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty pledged in writing to obey the taxpayer protection law, which requires a referendum before increasing taxes;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all of the McGuinty government's tax increases are put before the people of Ontario in a referendum."

I sign my name in full support.

1520

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I have a petition signed by a number of people from the Kapuskasing-Opasatika region that reads as follows:

"To: Legislative Assembly of Ontario

"Re: support for chiropractic services in Ontario health insurance plan:

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I have signed that petition.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on the topic of support for chiropractic services in the health insurance plan, which I file on behalf of constituents.

"Whereas:

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Qaadri: —in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I regret there's no specific provision for the member from Nepean-Carleton. Nevertheless, I present this to Vivienne.

TAXATION

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the taxpayer protection law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11, 2003, not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised in TV ads not to raise taxes by one penny on working families; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty pledged in writing to obey the taxpayer protection law, which requires a referendum before increasing taxes;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all of the McGuinty government's tax increases are put before the people of Ontario in a referendum."

I've signed this.

PENSION PLANS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Stelpipe Ltd and Welland Pipe Ltd are currently operating under the protection of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA), as part of the restructuring process being undertaken by Stelco Inc; and

"Whereas there is a significant unfunded liability in the Stelpipe and Welland Pipe pension plans for hourly employees; and

"Whereas there will be a significant negative impact on the pensions of both active employees and retirees in the event of a windup of these pension plans; and

"Whereas the pension benefits guarantee fund (PBGF) does not protect the entire amount of accrued pension benefits; and

"Whereas the PBGF may not have sufficient assets to provide such protection;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) to amend the provisions of the PBGF in order that it provides complete coverage and protection for the accrued pension benefits of all pension plan members;

"(2) to amend the financing provisions for the PBGF in order to ensure that sufficient funds are available to provide for the complete protection of all accrued pension benefits;

"(3) to take interim action as required in order to provide immediate protection of the accrued pension benefits of both active employees and retirees of Stelpipe and Welland Pipe."

It's signed by hundreds. I've signed it as well.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp (MPAC) and are subject to property taxes; and

"Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourism economy without requiring significant municipal services; and

"Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003; and that the tax not be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers and trailer parks, municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders."

There are nine petitions from various parts of Ontario, and I'll affix my name.

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm pleased to bring many more petitions to keep Muskoka as part of the north, and I shall read it them.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the district of Muskoka is currently designated as part of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the geography and socio-economic conditions of Muskoka are very similar to the rest of northern Ontario; and

"Whereas the median family income in the district of Muskoka is $10,000 below the provincial average and $6,000 below the median family income for greater Sudbury; and

"Whereas removing the district of Muskoka from northern Ontario would adversely affect the hard-working people of Muskoka by restricting access to programs and incentives enjoyed by residents of other northern communities; and

"Whereas the residents of Muskoka should not be confused with those who cottage or vacation in the district; and

"Whereas the federal government of Canada recognizes the district of Muskoka as part of the north; and

"Whereas this is a mean-spirited and politically motivated decision on the part of the McGuinty government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government maintain the current definition of northern Ontario for the purposes of government policy and program delivery."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

I would also like to deliver the first 3,000 across the Premier on the other side of the Legislature.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have more petitions sent to me by Dr Gary Bovine in Welland.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Re support for chiropractic services in Ontario health insurance plan:

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

It's signed by thousands and by myself.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly from a group of residents in the Meadowvale area of Mississauga. It reads:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and wish to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry or re-entry of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I'm pleased to sign this and to ask Jason to carry it down for me.

TAXATION

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to present a petition, one of literally thousands that have been put through my office, to force Premier McGuinty to obey the taxpayer protection law.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 2004 budget will break the taxpayer protection law by not conducting a referendum on tax increases; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty signed an election pledge on September 11, 2003, not to raise taxes without the explicit consent of voters through a referendum; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised in TV ads not to raise taxes by one penny on working families; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty pledged in writing to obey the taxpayer protection law, which requires a referendum before increasing taxes;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure that all of the McGuinty government's tax increases are put before the people of Ontario in a referendum."

I'm pleased to add my name to this petition.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I have a petition signed by people from Hallebourg, Hearst, Mattice and Constance Lake, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractors will no longer be able to access the health care they need; and

"Whereas those with reduced ability to pay, including seniors, low-income families and the working poor, will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments; and

"Whereas elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save $93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over $200 million in other health care costs; and

"Whereas there was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I sign that petition.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the so-called Tenant Protection Act of the defeated Harris-Eves Tories has allowed landlords to increase rents well above the rate of inflation for new and old tenants alike;

"Whereas the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal created by this act regularly awards major and permanent

additional rent increases to landlords to pay for required one-time improvements and temporary increases in utility costs;

"Whereas the same act has given landlords wide-ranging powers to evict tenants;

"Whereas before last October's elections Premier McGuinty promised 'real protection for tenants at all times';

"Whereas our own MPP ... called for a rent roll-back...;

"We, the undersigned residents of Dovercourt Square Apartments in Toronto, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately scrap all Tory guideline and above-guideline increases for 2004, as an elementary gesture of goodwill toward tenants, who voted massively against the Tories in last year's election;

"To shut down the notoriously pro-landlord Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal; and—"

Interjection.

Mr Ruprecht: I'm just reading this petition.

"To abrogate the Tory Tenant Protection Act and draw up new landlord-tenant legislation in consultation with tenants and housing rights campaigners."

Since I agree with the petition, I'm delighted to sign my name to it. I've signed my name, but remember, this is a petition. I'm not adding anything or taking anything away.

The Speaker (Mr Alvin Curling): Thank you.

Mr Ruprecht: It's my duty as a representative to read this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 7, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures / Projet de loi 83, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Pursuant to the order of the House dated Thursday, June 10, I am now required to put the question.

Mr Sorbara has moved second reading of Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1534 to 1544.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Peterson, Tim
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Kennedy, Gerard	Ramal, Khalil
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Sorbara, Greg
Cordiano, Joseph	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Wong, Tony C.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Patten, Richard	Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Speaker: All those against, please rise and be recognized by the clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm
Baird, John R.	Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John
Chudleigh, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Churley, Marilyn	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Dunlop, Garfield	Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.
Eves, Ernie	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Flaherty, Jim	Martel, Shelley	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hampton, Howard	Martiniuk, Gerry	Yakabuski, John

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 57; the nays are 27.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order dated June 10, the bill is ordered referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 9, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 86, An Act to amend the Election Act, the Election Finances Act, the Legislative Assembly Act and the Representation Act, 1996, to provide for provincial general elections at intervals of approximately four years, to govern the timing of writs, close of nominations and polling day, to make modifications relating to the electoral readjustment process, and to make technical amendments / Projet de loi 86, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, la Loi sur le financement des élections, la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi de 1996 sur la représentation électorale en vue de prévoir la tenue des élections générales provinciales à intervalles d'environ quatre ans, de régir le calendrier relatif à l'émission des décrets, à la clôture du dépôt des déclarations de candidature et au jour du scrutin, et d'apporter des modifications au processus de révision électorale ainsi que des modifications de forme.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member from Toronto-Danforth will have questions and comments.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Oh, are there questions and comments?

The Speaker: There will be, I understand, further debate, and I think I am still with the member for Toronto-Danforth.

Ms Churley: The rats seem to be deserting the sinking ship here. Where did everybody go?

I don't think you heard what I said, Mr Speaker, or you probably would have called me on that, but I think it was quite appropriate.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): Just take that back.

Ms Churley: Take it back that I said the rats are deserting the sinking ship? You want me to take that back? I won't take it back, because that's what's happening.

I just noticed that a certain number of Liberals did not applaud your budget, I would say to the finance minister. Not everybody's happy. See, they're still not applauding.

Applause.

Ms Churley: Some of them still aren't.

He's going to leave now. He can't take it. The chief rat is deserting the sinking ship now. I say that, of course, with great affection, because I was born in the Chinese year of the rat.

1550

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: This is, of course, addressed to the member from Toronto-Danforth. If she turns back she will see who is abandoning the ship right now.

The Speaker: That's not a point of order, but I just want to ask the member for Toronto-Danforth—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Member for Toronto-Danforth, I presume you will now direct your comments to this.

Ms Churley: I will, Mr Speaker. I'd just like to say that I was born in the year of the rat, under the Chinese symbols, and I've personally got nothing against rats, but they do desert sinking ships.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: I'm so wounded by the comments from the member for—I forget his riding.

To the bill we're debating today: We're talking about democracy.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: High Park, that's right. No, Parkdale.

Mr Ruprecht: Davenport.

Ms Churley: Davenport. Whatever. You're distracting me here.

A good rule of thumb is, if something is not broken, don't fix it. In this case, the declining number of votes being cast by Ontarians signals that something is very broken with our electoral process. That something is people's trust in the process. I believe that we do need to move with great urgency to repair and restore citizens' faith in the provincial democracy. A number of parties and people across this land, across this province, have been saying that for some time.

The New Democratic Party, both in Ontario and the federal party, has spent a number of years with a citizens' committee from the New Democratic Party and others involved. Others with expertise—university professors and lay people who have done a lot of work in this area—have come together over a number of years and come forward with possible designs and models for some form of proportional representation in this province. I know that Jack Layton and the federal party under Lorne Nystrom have also been, for a number of years, working on proportional representation. Equal Voice, the group with Rosemary Spiers, Doris Anderson—our own Frances Lankin, is involved in that, as well as Janet Ecker. It is a non-partisan group that has come together to try to make sure there are more women in Parliament.

There are a number of organizations and groups out there that have been working on these issues for a long time, so when the minister responsible for democratic renewal stood up the other day and said he was moving forward on democratic renewal, I was expecting some kind of momentous announcement, that at last we're going to set up the process for reviewing and ultimately bringing to a referendum some form of coming forward with some kind of proportional representation model that will suit today's democracy in this global economy, far better than the archaic system we have now, which really doesn't work that well for people any more in this province. We've seen that by the decline in voter turnout in this province.

This broken trust is the sum of a whole bunch of factors, not just some of the logistical problems we can cite, and that I will cite, with the system we have today. The Liberal Party, in this last election and now in this Legislature, has contributed greatly because of the broken election promises, because of a government that went out and made over 200 promises to the people of Ontario. They were told they could have all of those things with no increase in taxes. Indeed, the Premier, then the leader of the official opposition, stood and looked straight in people's eyes on TV and signed a pledge saying that he would not raise taxes. It was a pledge, a solemn pledge to the people of Ontario. He promised those new programs and to restore all the damage created by the previous government, and also that he wouldn't raise the deficit. Looking straight into people's eyes, he solemnly pledged this over and over again, while we, the New Democrats, told the truth in the election. We knew, and we didn't pretend otherwise.

My leader, Howard Hampton, is sitting here beside me. I remember our talking about this, as well as proportional representation and ways to change the system, preparing for the election and saying we'd like to go out there and say to people we can restore all the damage done by the Tory government after tax cuts to the richest in this province, over 30% in tax reductions for the wealthy and for big corporations in this province—with the result being a lack in faith in our democracy any

more. People were promised under the Tories that they could have everything—the moon and the stars. There was so much waste in government that they could give all these tax breaks and it wouldn't hurt the vital programs to our people.

Then Walkerton happened. We saw all the other damage throughout every program. Every system in this province was hurt as a result of the Harris-Eves cuts, as a result of the tax reductions for mainly rich people. We knew then that what Mike Harris was saying was not possible.

Before Walkerton happened, I stood up in this House, and it was cited. Mr Hampton was there with me when then-Premier Mike Harris was being questioned at the Walkerton inquiry. He was told that there were five direct warnings given, that something like Walkerton could happen because of the downloading, the cuts and getting rid of the public water testing labs. He cited two questions—not one, but two separate questions—I had asked in this House, one to him and one to a Minister of the Environment, that these things could happen as a result.

There were other warnings by others, and nobody listened. We said then that what Mike Harris was saying couldn't be done, and we were right. Look at the damage that was caused to our education system and to our health care system. The poor got poorer and the rich got richer, and we're in this mess today.

Then we had Mr McGuinty, the leader of the official opposition, who was desperate to get elected, desperate this time to get the Liberals elected because they'd been up in the polls ever since 1990 and the election would come and they'd lose. So this time Mr McGuinty went too far. No wonder people are cynical about the democratic process.

We New Democrats knew, and many people out there who were paying any attending knew, that there was going to be at least a $5-billion deficit. I figured it out, and I'm no economist—I think my leader would say that's not necessarily one of my stronger points. Even I remember going to a press conference when then-Minister of Finance Ecker held a rather desperate press conference to show—because the word was out there by then—that there was going to be a big deficit and tried to show that there would only be one or two billion, which is what the Liberals went with eventually. Hidden in that, if you read the fine print and added up what were supposed to be asset sales, which weren't identified, and some other things—it was Charlie Campbell, who has now moved on but was then the director of research for the NDP, and I who pored through this. We went out and spoke to the press and said, "Well, she says there's only a $2-billion deficit, but we can see, reading between the lines, that there's an over $5-billion deficit." If I could see that, anybody could see that.

I can tell you, the Liberals at the time had a much bigger research department than we did. Gerry Phillips, then the finance critic, was quoted a couple of times. I have the quotes. He said, "There's a chance of a $5-billion risk." There was another time that he said essentially what I said. His quote was very similar to mine: "When you add up all the asset sales and all the deficits to the hospitals and other things, we're looking at a $5-billion deficit."

So what I'm saying is that the people of Ontario, and indeed the people of Canada, are cynical about politicians, the political process and democracy. It's not just because we have an outdated system that needs changing; it does, which I'm going to go into in a minute. I just want to remind people that as long as politicians bury their heads in the sand, as the Liberals did in the previous election, and don't tell people—how should I put this in a parliamentary way?—the reality, the facts; the facts at that time were that we were looking at a $5-billion deficit or more, and the Liberals stood up and said, "We will give you everything," practically promised a pony in every child's backyard. I believe the Premier said, "We can't quite go that far," but almost—the moon and the stars.

1600

Look at what happened: This government has gone down in the polls more rapidly than any other government before. Read today's Star: "Liberals Can't Put Humpty Together Again," by Ian Urquhart. Mr Urquhart, whom I know has a keen interest in democratic reform—we've spoken of it many times, as I'm sure others have—has some very keen insights of his own. So he writes today in the Toronto Star about some of the things the government said they would be looking at in terms of democratic renewal. He goes through them. He talks about "Far more significant reforms to our electoral practices," and says he's been told they're in the works, as were we, but I was expecting them to be announced the other day when we talked about this one minor thing—

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): Patience.

Ms Churley: I'm being told, "Patience." "Patience, everybody out there; it's coming." That's what we're being told. The government stood up and just announced that it's moving forward with a set date for elections.

Mr Urquhart goes on to mention proportional representation and that "the Liberals promised in their election platform" that they would "set up a 'citizens' assembly' to consider proposals for electoral reform, including proportional representation...." Of course, there are many forms of proportional representation. The New Democrats have looked at every form there is in the world and have some ideas of our own of what would make sense for Ontario, but what we want to see is it being put in a very fair, non-partisan way to the people of Ontario. We were expecting that to be announced, and it wasn't.

He talks about election financing. Mr Urquhart says there should be "tighter restrictions on campaign spending, which the Liberals also promised in their election platform. In addition, the government is looking at a ban on corporate and union donations to political parties and limits on third-party advertising, both of which are in place federally."

He talks about the voters list, and we all know this is something the Liberal government promised, but there was nothing about that; a lower voting age, something that will be very interesting to look at, something I and New Democrats support; Internet voting, another thing that will help give people access to be able to vote more easily.

But what Mr Urquhart ends his column with is this: "But as for reducing voter cynicism, I am afraid no amount of tinkering with the system will overcome the damage done by the Liberals' broken promises and the Conservatives' hidden deficit."

I believe that is basically true, and that's what the Liberals, and therefore all of us, are up against now: trying to overcome this cynicism that's out there for a darned good reason. You hear now in the federal election that so few people actually believe anything anybody says, because they watch Mr Martin as well. He brags about the fact that when he was the finance minister of the federal Liberal Party he was able to bring down the deficit. Sure enough, he did, but on the backs of the provinces, cutting transfer payments and downloading programs to the provinces, with the provinces then downloading to municipalities. It was a race for the bottom. Therefore, a lot of promises that Mr Martin made in the last campaign, that the Liberals made in the last couple of campaigns—a national daycare program and more money to the provinces for health care. Instead, more money was taken away. And all kinds of other promises have been broken.

So no wonder people are so cynical about politicians and the democratic process. They feel, "What difference does it make? How do I trust politicians to keep their promises?"

I believe the level of disengagement has been growing over the past decade, and there's all kinds of evidence for that. According to Elections Ontario, only 57% of eligible voters showed up at the polls. In 1999, it was only 58%; in 1995, 63%. So it's going down. Voter disengagement has become one of the major stories of this federal election.

A set election date amounts to only a small gesture that hardly scratches the surface of renewing people's faith in the electoral process. When the AG first announced introducing fixed election dates, I supported the move, and I must say, no, it's not just because it meant the end of my terrible track record when it comes to predicting election dates. I'm always losing bets, and I mentioned that day that I will not have to go out and buy fine wine any more for journalists, mostly, and colleagues whom I bet with. I don't know why I bet with journalists on election dates, because they tend to hear more, they tend to know more than I do about when it's coming. I always lose those. I should be quite clear, though: I still owe Gil Hardy a bottle of wine. I should also be clear here that I don't go out and buy fine wine. I make my own wine, with my own labels on it—

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): Are they Ontario grapes?

Ms Churley: —and that's what the poor press ends up having to get. They're Ontario grapes. I only buy Ontario wine.

Seriously, though, we had just received the bill that day. I know that fixed election dates are very popular with people. I think any move by anybody to try to improve the system is popular with people. But when you take just this fixed election date out of context, when it's not part of your cherry-picking, really, and in a sense the easiest piece to pull out—I know the government is desperate now to have something they can look at and say, "Hey, a promise kept. We're keeping our promise on this." They can say it over the summer.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: Yes, but far more broken promises than ones you've kept.

But when you pull it out of the whole general context of electoral reform and democratic renewal, it is such a small piece. In fact, I would go further than that, because now I want to give more of a critique, after having had an opportunity to read it and talk to others who perhaps had better knowledge of this than I did, and discuss the implications of it. I've come to the conclusion that out there, all by itself, it may increase voter cynicism. I say it and I'm going to tell you why and what some others are saying.

I know the Toronto Star had an editorial expressing concern about moving to an American system with fixed dates and all the implications of that, the year-long—

Interjection.

Ms Churley: Well, that's what we're here for, to critique and give reasons why we have to look at these kinds of things carefully, which is why I'm glad we're debating it today.

A member of the Liberal Party who's sitting in the rump to my left here is saying, "How come you guys never agree to anything? First you say you support it, then you don't," blah, blah. Well, that's what we're here for, to critique these things, because backbenchers in any government—that's part of what's wrong with the system too—are there to prop up the government. No matter what they think themselves, they are there to just go along with it. Half the time, backbenchers don't even know what they are voting on. They are busy doing other things and they're just, "Oh, yes, you vote this way today on this." That's the reality. We have an opposition to point out the problems with legislation and to suggest improvements to legislation.

I want to point out again that the Toronto Star raised, in its editorial, some very good points around what could happen when this is hanging out there all by itself, without the rest of the package along with it.

1610

Some opponents to the government setting a fixed election date worry that it would give rise to the US phenomenon of prolonged campaigning, when government becomes overwhelmed by unofficial campaigning during the last year of the mandate, all of this in anticipation of election day. As we know, that's what goes on in the

United States. Ontario is at risk of seeing this trend repeat itself here if the bill passes in its current form, without some of the other democratic renewal going along with it.

This bill fails to include measures needed to stave off constant campaigning—and this is a really big one, an important one—such as imposing spending limits between election campaigns. Because that piece is left out, this bill actually has the potential to spur on more voter cynicism rather than curb it.

I also wanted to bring up the government's target of trying to achieve a 10% increase in voter turnout. I said at the time of the announcement that I don't think this government will have a lot of trouble getting a 10% increase in voter turnout in the next election. You don't need any electoral reform to cause that to happen, because I expect—and I wonder if I'll make a bet again—that there are going to be people coming out in droves to turf this new Liberal government out.

I also want to say that, in addition to fixing this bill, so much more is required to renew citizens' engagement with their government. Another telling measure of the level of pessimism out there is that so many non-voters are people who want to make a contribution to their community. They are our youth.

I'm happy to say that I supported the leadership of my friend and colleague Jack Layton to run the federal New Democratic Party as our new leader. One of the things that excited all of us in having Jack take over the leadership was his ability, because of his programs and his never-ending energy—he's like the energy bunny; he never stops. His programs, his positive attitude toward life and the things we can do as a community, in partnership with people, have brought youth to our party in droves. That's been a very positive movement, not only for our party but for politics in this country.

Some of these youth are the most informed and articulate generation of youth that our history has ever seen. They are individuals who are very involved in grassroots work. They are dynamic community leaders. These people are eager to see and be part of bringing about meaningful change that leads to a more prosperous, just and green Canada, but many of them are choosing not to vote. It's not because they're apathetic, as some people might say, but many don't vote because they don't believe their vote will be heard and, within the existing system, they're right. They vote for people who don't stand a chance of getting a seat, or they vote for people and then they're told, "No, no, don't vote," as happened to the NDP, not so much in this election, but certainly big time, because there was an orchestrated campaign, in the previous election. But it happened naturally this time. People so wanted to get the Tories out that they were being told, "Don't vote for what you believe in. Don't vote for the party you trust and believe in most"—ie, in this case, the NDP and in some cases the Greens—"because your vote will be wasted. We've got to make sure you vote strategically to kick out what we don't like, as opposed to voting for what you believe in."

That's wrong. We have to change a system that is set up and designed in a such a way that it encourages people to actually not vote for what they believe in, what they want to see, the kind of province or Canada they want to see, but to vote against something. I would say we've come to a time when the only way we're going to be able to bring a lot of these dynamic young people back into the process is to give them a system that allows them to vote for what they believe in, who they believe in, so that they feel their vote is not wasted.

First-past-the-post, which we have now, has outlived its usefulness. I've been saying that for some time. It fails to translate an accurate representation of the makeup of contemporary Canada and its diverse views and voices.

As I said earlier, the NDP has been studying how to re-energize Canadian democracy, and we have found that the model of mixed-member proportional representation could be an option to consider. Already in places like New Zealand and Germany, this system retains the better parts of the first-past-the-post system, providing voters strong local representation—which I don't think anybody wants to give up—while reducing the discrepancy between a party's share of seats in the Legislature and its share of the vote.

When you get into proportional representation, some people will try to make it really complicated. It can sound really complicated because there are tons of models out there and some work better than others. We're often given examples of the ones that work less well than others; people hold up Israel, for one, and I've forgotten the other place now. There are two countries where people say this system is dysfunctional, but they don't use as an example some of those that work very, very well and have been working for a long time. Those are the kinds of things the people of Ontario need to take a very good look at and pick a system that works best for Ontario so that people feel their regions, their communities, can be represented by somebody who is from their community and understands their community but will also allow a certain proportion of the party that gets a certain amount of votes—that that proportion represents them as well here in the Legislature.

I want to get to another point, and I'm going to talk about it for a little bit because it's something I'm very concerned about, that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech today on democratic renewal; that is, the deficit of women and minorities in public office. I can say without a doubt, if you study all the documentation out there—countries across the world that have some form of proportional representation have more women and visible minorities representing their areas.

I must say, as the NDP critic for women's issues—and I have been for some time now—I do want to talk about the lack of gender parity in Canadian Legislatures. Women compose more than half of Canada's population but still hold only 20% of the seats in Canadian Legislatures. Different factors account for women not breaking the glass ceiling in politics. In fact we've broken that glass ceiling to some extent, in varying

degrees, in business and in other sectors in the world, but we still have this really huge, thick glass ceiling in politics for women. One of them is our present electoral system.

I'm going to tell you about some research conducted by Equal Voice. I mentioned Equal Voice before, and I ask everybody to take a look at the Equal Voice Web site because there's a wealth of information there. It's chaired now by Rosemary Spiers, who actually works for the Toronto Star and used to be, as I understand it, a legislative intern here at one time. She developed a keen interest in women and politics, and she's now chair of Equal Voice. There are a number of very prominent women from all parties on this committee, which is working diligently and hard to make people understand that we have to do something concrete and real. It's not going to happen by osmosis or by itself. We've tried that, but it hasn't been working.

I should also mention Doris Anderson, whose 80th birthday was celebrated a number of years ago. She's very keen and clear about why we need to change the electoral system in order to get more women elected. She's been a powerful voice and continues to show up at all kinds of events to speak about Equal Voice and about changes that are needed to get more women in politics.

The research by Equal Voice shown by this group dedicated to raising publicly the issue of underrepresentation of women in our national Parliament, as well as our provincial Legislatures, has found that democracies with proportional representation have, on average, twice as many women in their Legislatures compared to jurisdictions that use first-past-the-post, such as Canada. And Canada, Mr Speaker—I don't know if you're aware of this—which used to be a leader in electing women to public office, now ranks 36th in the world among democracies in terms of women's representation in the national Legislature.

This slide is mirrored provincially as well. In Ontario—and I've paid a keen interest to this, having been elected as one of the highest number of women elected and in cabinet in 1990 under the NDP, and watching with some despair those numbers go down since then. Twenty-eight women sat in the assembly when the NDP was in government from 1990 to 1995. That figure decreased to 19 when the Conservatives took over and to 18 in their second term. We've come up a bit since then, but not up to the 28, which, may I say, although it was the highest, was not good enough either. But things were going up, at least. We're now at 23 female members in this Legislature.

1620

What I've also noticed with despair is that the number of women in leadership roles has dramatically declined over the past decade. When the NDP was in government, about a third of the members of cabinet were women. That was 14 out of the—I forget the exact number; I know we reduced it—20-odd; 14 of maybe 28 or so were women. I want to point out that today, out of the provincial Liberal cabinet, we only have five women. So we've gone from 14 when the NDP was in power and we have only five women in the provincial Liberal cabinet today. I think that's a shame. There are some other very competent females who could be appointed to cabinet, and I'm disappointed to see that number going down instead of up. This is not about quotas. There are always women, no matter what the circumstances, who are more than capable and equal, or more than equal, to men to fill any position you can think of.

I understand that in a government—I've been there—the Premier has to make difficult choices about who's in cabinet, because there has to be regional representation and you have to look at francophones and all kinds of other considerations to make sure the communities are well represented. I understand that, and it's very important. But I still do not understand how the Premier of this province ended up appointing only five women to his cabinet.

As a result, after seeing women gain ground in provincial politics a decade ago, the number in elected office today has not just plateaued but is actually going down. It has waned. We're going backwards. We've taken one step forward and two or three back. That's not good enough. In fact, I find that outrageous. I really do. How come we continue to go backwards? What is going on with our system? Why do we have more women not running at all, or being put up—

Interjection.

Ms Churley: Yeah, power to the women. That's right. Let's hear it. We've got to do something about that. The numbers are going down, not up. There's a problem here. They're laughing. I consider this to be a really serious issue, Mr Speaker.

I was glad to read in the Toronto Star that the minister had indicated that a citizens' assembly regarding proportional representation will convene this fall. We'll see if that happens. But I want to say that these consultations, again, like the bill we're debating today, can and will result in more disillusionment if these sessions follow the disingenuous—and I chose that word carefully—format of the pre-budget public consultations the Liberals held this past fall. Many of our constituents out there describe these sessions as public relations dog-and-pony shows rather than authentic consultations. I bring that up—

Interjections.

Ms Churley: Oh, yeah, we heard that a lot. I know you don't like to hear it, but it's true. And I bring it up—it's critical—because if there is some kind of citizens' process across this province, we want to be darned sure that it's absolutely neutral, that the Liberals won't have a plan already thought up, look through the various options available to them in terms of some kind of PR system and come up with one they think suits them best, as Liberals, to get the maximum amount of seats in the next election.

I will be the first to admit that it's hard to get a majority government of any stripe to change the system in such a way that will make it nearly impossible, if not impossible, to be able to form a majority dictatorship-like government again. It's a lot to ask of any government in

power. It's easy to stand up and say, "We're going to make a fixed election date," but to actually bring in some form of proportional representation that will be better for the people of Ontario but actually hurt that party's chances and disallow them from sitting in a majority government again is a lot to ask of any majority government.

That's why I say it's extremely important that the government be very transparent about this system, if they do go forward with it, and make sure there is no hidden plan, no hidden model, that somehow any kind of citizens' group asked to look at this issue is not manipulated behind the scenes to come up with a plan that the Liberals would like to see.

I want to come back to talking a bit about women and the problem we have with, as I said, taking one step forward and two steps back. Things were getting better. We were electing more women, and I should say visible minorities as well. Our communities are not represented well enough in all those areas. I've been particularly interested in what's been happening with the decline of women within Parliament.

I read this very interesting article, probably pulled off Equal Voice—that's where I get a lot of my information, because they do such good research. This article is by Linda Trimble and Jane Arscott, the authors of Still Counting: Women in Politics Across Canada, published in 2003 by Broadview Press. I'm going to tell you some of the information they were able to compile about what's been happening with the decline of women in politics, in provinces and in Canada.

They say they've "been counting the number of elected women in Canada's Legislatures for over a decade and we persist for two reasons. First, by any measure, Canada is far short of gender parity, the goal of electing women to about 50% of the political posts." I think we would all agree that should be our goal, wouldn't we, Mr Speaker? I think you would agree with me that that should be the ultimate goal. I doubt if anybody disagrees with that. It's about how we get there.

"Second," the study says, "we can't assume steady progress for women in the political arena. Indeed, there is clear evidence of a downward trend, signalling that the electoral project, the goal of electing more and more diverse women, has stalled." It's getting worse instead of better. "Recently, women have been bumping their heads on the electoral glass ceiling, an invisible barrier to women's progress in public life." It's the glass ceiling I talked about earlier that women feel more and more that they're bumping their heads on.

When this group published Still Counting a year ago, they said that only 20% of Canada's elected representatives at the federal and provincial levels were women, and they argued at that time that the glass ceiling seemed set at the 25% mark for the foreseeable future. But since Still Counting went to press, nine provincial and territorial elections have been held. I think it says 505 seats were available; women won only 113 of them. So after 12 months and nine elections, there was no change in the percentage of women elected across Canada. Women still hold only 20% of the seats in the Legislatures, well below even that glass ceiling mark of 25% and not getting even close to 50%.

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In this study, there are a number of graphs. I can't use props, but if at some point you look at these graphs, you see very clearly how we were starting to go up, women were starting to move in an upward trend, and now it's going down again. The authors of this study say, "If we break down these numbers, the picture becomes even clearer. There is modest progress in very few places. Quebec is the one province bearing good news; there the percentage of women elected has risen steadily, and increased dramatically in the last election. In 2003, Quebec women won over 30% of the seats in the National Assembly, setting a record. In Newfoundland, Ontario and Nova Scotia the increases were much more subtle, under 3%."

What the study concludes is exactly what I said and that Equal Voice and others who are looking at proportional representation are saying: "Overall, the news is" very "bad for women. Numbers have dropped in half of Canada's provinces and territories as a result of the most recent elections. The prairie provinces, where women first won the right to vote and first entered political office, provide a clear example." Their numbers are going down as well.

We have to ask, what is going on? Why is the number of women in politics going down? They say there are a number of reasons for that. The summary of the study says, "We need to be active in promoting election finance reform...." I mentioned that earlier. The major issue for a lot of women who want to run, is the lack of the huge amount of money you need to run a political campaign these days, even to win a nomination. If you look at the studies, it is a huge problem for women when they want to run.

That should have been part of the announcement of fixed election dates. Whether you agree with it or not—and as I said earlier, there are issues and problems around that, although it's very popular with the population—I think it is such a small piece of the overall democratic reform we need that in some ways it's hardly worth dwelling on.

As I said, I believe if you go there without some of these other pieces attached, it could actually make things worse. That's why I'm worried. On the surface it looks good. It's a promise made and it's popular with the population. But when you look at it out of context, when it's just cherry-picked out of the other kinds of reforms, like financial reform—how much money is spent even between elections, and parties being able to take money from big business and corporations and unions—all of those are things the government promised, but they were not announced when this was announced. Therefore, this piece standing all by itself could be very problematic.

Again, in the whole scheme of things, that is not very relevant to what the people of Ontario say they need. Some of the reasons given for why the government

decided to proceed with this one piece is that they made the promise and that the public wants to see this, and that the government, the Premier, is actually giving up a clear advantage over others.

Well, if you look at the history of governments being elected in this province for some time, it appears it hasn't been much of an advantage for most governments over the last few years. Only the Premier and his few trusted advisers were aware of when an election might be called, and the rest of us were out there guessing. But look at who actually won those last several elections: not the party in power, not the Premier in power—except for the Tories having won those two elections in a row.

But look what happened to Peterson. When he called an early election in 1990, he had the advantage of knowing he was calling the election and was able to do whatever was necessary to work up to that election. Look what happened to him: The NDP won the government. And look what happened to us. We waited until the last minute. By the time Bob Rae called the election, there was no time left; it had to be called then. We were hoping our fortunes would improve. They didn't. Certainly having the advantage of calling the election at the Premier's pleasure did not help us.

Sure it gives more certainty to the people, but I don't believe it's going to make any difference in terms of government—well, everybody—being aware there's an election coming, with money being spent on more programs working up to that date as normal. Overall, it doesn't make that much difference. It can save the opposition a bit of money. I remember last year, that not knowing for sure when the election was going to be called ruined my summer. I admit it. I kept going away and having to come back. We opened our office; we weren't sure if there was going to be an election or not. So sure, for political parties and ridings, there are some advantages to this. But I think the disadvantages outweigh the advantages when you look at it all by itself without these other reforms, especially financial reform, as part of it.

I digressed a little bit here because I think it's really important to point that out over and over again to those who, as I did on first glance, look at this and think it sounds good. When you start looking at the implications of it, without these other reforms going along with it, it actually could make voters more cynical. It could create more problems than we have now.

The other thing the authors of this study say, besides being, "active in promoting election finance reform, to reduce the role of money in the campaign and nomination process and in urging electoral system reform," is they're really big on some form of proportional representation.

They also say, "More progress will be made, and more quickly, with a fairer, more transparent electoral system. Thirdly, we need to work on recruiting, training and supporting female political aspirants. Finally, we should recognize the sacrifices and hard work of those women serving in Legislatures across the country, regardless of their political affiliation. Women need to know that their public service is appreciated and valued."

I think all of those—the study that was done by Linda Trimble and Jane Arscott, who looked very, very closely at what's been happening in Canada with women being elected. It's very interesting information.

Another study that I have looked at recently is GP Murray. We're all familiar with Graham Murray Research Ltd. He's had a keen interest in our electoral system and in democratic reform as well. He did an election watch on September 26, 2003, during the last provincial election, called Women at Queen's Park, 1981 through 2003. When you look at the numbers, it really is quite distressing. They're staring you in the face. He goes back to 1981, and I should say—nobody else is going to toot the NDP's horn here, so I'm going to do it—the NDP always does better than the other parties. If you look at all the numbers, both on the federal level and the provincial level, we always do better than the other parties and, in some cases, significantly better. But that's not through accident. That's through design. That's through our party coming together across the country and across the province and saying we've got to do something. Because if we don't, looking at what's happening with the other parties, we can see the decline in numbers. We have to do something. So we put in place a system that is fair, and it's still not getting us up to the 50%. But I know that in the federal election, for instance, under Jack Layton, we have over 30%. I don't know how much or, Howard, if you're aware, but 32% or something of our candidates are women and a number of them are running in winnable ridings.

Of course, we watched what Paul Martin did to high-profile women in the federal party. Sheila Copps is the perfect example, and how horrified, speaking of democracy watch—and after Paul Martin had actually made a speech about how for this election he was going to work at getting, I believe, 50% of the candidates to be women. Well, they haven't even come close to that. Not even close.

But then we saw in a couple of places the Prime Minister go in and appoint—some were men and some were women, which is another process, interestingly enough, that New Democrats don't agree with. We don't think that's the way to do it. We don't think walking in to a riding and taking away that riding's, that party's, democratic right to select their own candidates is the right way to go either. That's worse, I think, than a quota system in some ways. What the NDP does—it certainly has not provided the up to 50% that we want to see, but we have a system in place where all riding associations have been told that they can't nominate until they can prove they've gone out and have sought candidates who are women and visible minorities who have the credentials and the capacity to run. This is not about tokenism. As I said earlier, there are all kinds of people—female, male, visible minorities—in all our communities who are more than capable of running in nominations, winning those nominations and going on to serve their province or their country. It's just that often, because of the glass ceiling, for a number of reasons, they get left out.

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We make sure that our riding associations go out there. We have somebody on staff, both provincially and federally, whose job it is to work with riding associations across the province—and right now, in the federal election, across the country—to make sure they are going out there and seeking female candidates, visible minorities, people with disabilities, people who are generally left out of the political process. They are invited to work in the back rooms—no doubt about it—but frequently they are left out of the political process when it comes to standing up and at least running for the nomination, but being put in a position where they can win that nomination as well.

Clearly, if you look at the numbers across the country and provincially, you will see that there is a reason why New Democrats traditionally do better on all levels in terms of running women and other, what we refer to as, equity-seeking groups. I believe at least 50% of our candidates—I hope I've got the number right here—are either women or what we refer to as equity-seeking groups. We really work hard on it, but we don't appoint, because that is not democratic.

I would suggest that the other parties look at some form of the same process that New Democrats use in order to get more females and other equity-seeking groups elected or running as candidates in winnable ridings. That is the other thing we see a lot, and we work hard on that, to make sure, as New Democrats, that women are run in winnable ridings. The other thing that happens quite often—and I've seen it happen a lot—is that women can be put in by a particular party in absolutely unwinnable ridings, to bring the numbers up a bit, which also isn't fair. This is the only way we're going to bring these numbers up here in Parliament, so that we can look around and see at least 50% of the representatives, here and in the federal Parliament, being women. After all, over 50% of our population are women. Those are the kinds of things we have to do, that parties have to do, and I would suggest that everybody get with it.

I'm going to read something to you. In 1981, the PCs had 13 women candidates—10.4%—and elected four out of 70, which is 5.7%. The Liberals had 8—6.4%—and one out of 34 was elected—this is back in 1981—which is 2.9%. The NDP, even back then, were doing relatively well.

I'm going to come up to 2003. Let me go back first. Perhaps I should go back to 1995. The PCs had 20 female candidates—15.4%—and 11 out of 82 elected were women. That was 13.4%. The Liberals had 31 women—23.8%. That is four out of 30—13.3%. The NDP had 38 candidates—that was 22.8%—four out of 17. That is 23.5% elected. The totals were 89 candidates out of 390. The candidates' percentage was 22.8% elected, 19 out of 130, 14.6%. Before that—the reason I'm reading these numbers is to show you how we're going down. In 1990, when the NDP won the government, the PCs had 15% elected; the Liberals, 16.7% elected; the NDP, 25.7% elected. A third of the women were in cabinet at that time. If you look at all the numbers, except in Quebec, they're going down across this country. So we absolutely have to do better.

I've just got a few minutes left, Mr Speaker.

This was an opportunity to talk about why we need to change the system. A big part of that for me, as a women's issues critic and as a person who's interested in seeing more women representing their communities, is a very good reason to look at some form of proportional representation. The studies have been done. There are some models that work very well. We can come up with a model here in Ontario that works best for Ontario and we can have, as a result, better representation of our communities. That includes women, other visible minorities, people with disabilities, all those people out there who are involved in the political process but have been shut out of the system. So all these things can make a huge difference and we can renew our democratic system so that people feel engaged again and feel that their vote matters and that the person they vote for, whose ideas they support, can make a difference to their lives—that if they vote for them, it will in fact make a difference.

One of the things we have to change as well, and I started with this at the beginning of my speech, is the cynicism people have about the first-past-the-post system, where you don't have to co-operate with anybody—once you're in, you're in; you can do what you want—and where leaders of parties—as happened with the provincial Liberal leader, who was so desperate to win the government that he went out and made all kinds of promises he knew he couldn't keep.

People are really fed up with that. I believe if people have a change in the system where they know they're going to elect people from all parties—newer and smaller parties with new ideas can come into the system—political parties are going to work more for the betterment of all the people of Ontario.

We're not going to be able to do it with the existing first-past-the-post system any more. We see clearly that it doesn't work any more, for all kinds of reasons. When we have a government like we have now, the Liberal government, that stood up and made all those promises and people voted for them thinking they could have it all without tax increases, and then found out that they were misinformed, then no wonder people get more and more cynical about the process and just feel like giving up. That's why that's such a big issue these days.

The only way we're going to fix that is for the Liberals to come forward now. Let's not wait. Let's start the process of democratic renewal, because that's the only way we're going to make the changes that are necessary. Just giving a fixed election date is not going to do the trick. We should not be bringing it in until it's part of a bigger package of democratic renewal.

My advice to the government would be to withdraw this bill right now and include it in the entire package of democratic reform, if that indeed is what we are going to see in the next sitting.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I want to make a couple of comments on the remarks of the member for Toronto-Danforth.

First of all, I want to start by saying that this move the government is making to fix election dates, in fact, is part of the larger package of reforms and the larger program that we are going to put in place. Much of what the member said in terms of cynicism about politics—I think it's a little disingenuous to suggest that cynicism about politics has started in the very recent past. I think we could go back quite a while and see other junctures where people started to think, "Politics isn't what we want it to be." Having said that, the idea that people will know when the next election is going to be and can plan for it, it's predictable—teachers will know when the election is coming and can build that into their curriculum—I think, is a very positive move.

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The member seemed to suggest that this piece couldn't stand alone, and I guess I would suggest that the idea of giving people as much notice as possible about when the next election is going to be is why we are introducing this right now: so people will know exactly when the election is going to be—October 4, 2007. We don't have to wait.

The conversation about first past the post versus proportional representation is a much longer conversation, and that's why in our platform we said we're going to set up that discussion with citizens' assemblies. We're going to have that discussion. It's going to take longer.

But we want people to know when the next election is going to be so there's no doubt in people's minds. It is a major step in terms of taking away a piece of leverage from the Premier, but in fact giving that power back to the citizens so they will know, they can plan and there will be no guessing.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm pleased to respond to the member from Toronto-Danforth with respect to this bill, which is dealing with fixed-term elections.

Yesterday, I was listening to the CBC cross-country program; they had a federal debate on in my riding of Barrie. There was a pointed question put to all candidates about fixed-term elections. In the response to the question, the NDP person who was running, Mr Peter Bursztyn, indicated that the NDP was supportive of fixed-term elections. The Conservative Party candidate, Patrick Brown, indicated that the Conservative Party was supportive; it was in their platform that they were supportive of fixed-term elections. The Green Party candidate, Mr Jacoby-Hawkins, indicated also that the Green Party was supportive of fixed-term elections. Interestingly enough, the federal Liberal candidate, Aileen Carroll, did not commit the federal Liberals to fixed-term elections. She said that it was under review, that Paul Martin had not indicated one way or the other that they were going to do that.

So when we talk about the democratic deficit and dealing with the power of the Prime Minister's office, it's very interesting that Paul Martin is not interested in weakening in any way the power of the Prime Minister's office with respect to going for fixed-term elections. So what we have here is the federal Liberals saying they're not committed to fixed-term elections. Everybody knows what is important about fixed-term elections: it fundamentally weakens the Prime Minister's office, as it would the Premier's office.

I guess we'll have to see whether the provincial Liberals can be trusted with actually putting this legislation through. That's the big test here. The federal Conservative Party was supportive of fixed-term elections, and the federal Liberals weren't.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to comment briefly on my colleague from Toronto-Danforth's interesting and enlightening speech.

The government would want Ontarians to believe that somehow implementing a fixed election date is a truly revolutionary reform of democracy. I simply want to echo her words and point out that there's really not much in this bill whatsoever. In fact, even with the passage of this bill, there would be nothing that would stop the Premier of the day from going to the Lieutenant Governor's office and saying, "I want you to dissolve the Legislature and hold an election." Nothing would stop the Premier of the day from doing that, and there would be nothing to stop the Lieutenant Governor from doing that, nor would this bill prevent a government from potentially engineering a confidence motion and then losing the confidence motion so as to call a snap election.

I hope that people who truly do care about democracy recognize that there's really not a lot here. There's not much here at all.

As for the government trumpeting that at last they've kept a promise, well, this is a pretty light, pretty superficial promise indeed.

I also want people to note, as my colleague from Toronto-Danforth has pointed out, that there really are substantive issues to be dealt with in terms of democratic reform. But the legislation that has been presented here doesn't address any of those. It doesn't even raise any of the interesting questions. It doesn't do any of those things.

So once again to people across the province: This is pretty superficial, pretty thin gruel, when in fact there are real democratic debates that need to be engaged in.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I want to comment on the speech by the member from Toronto-Danforth. I'd like to start by pointing out a few numbers. She mentioned, quite correctly I'm sure, that when the NDP was in power there were 28 women members and there are currently 23 women members, and implied that somehow this was a decrease. What she didn't mention was that the number of members in the House has actually decreased. When the NDP government was in power, 21.5% of the members were women. Currently, 22.3% of the members are women. I wouldn't dispute her fact that when the Conservative government was in power the number of women in the House did go down

dramatically, and I would certainly agree with her that it would be a good thing to have more women. But to imply that somehow the Liberals have a worse record than the NDP is just not true.

What I did want to talk about was the concern that was raised about an unofficial prolonged campaign. I would like to point out that one of the groups that has an unofficial campaign is Elections Ontario. If we look at what happened while Mr Eves dithered in this past experience, Elections Ontario, back about February, hired returning officers, rented returning offices, went out and did the spot enumeration update—all waiting for Mr Eves to call the campaign that never happened. After four or five months of renting offices, they finally had to cancel the leases and then had to go and get new leases when he really did call the campaign. That's wasting taxpayers' money, and that will no longer happen because we know when the next election will be.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Toronto-Danforth has two minutes to reply.

Ms Churley: I know why the Liberals are desperate to get this voted on before they go out over the summer break. It's because they're going to get beaten up so badly about the broken promises, and they're going to be able to say, "Hey, we kept a promise. We're bringing in fixed election dates."

Interjection: We're not that shallow.

Ms Churley: They're not that shallow, they say.

It's not me who is saying that the Liberals have a worse record than the NDP on getting women into politics. Read the statistics; look at the statistics. It is a fact, we would all agree, that we need to see more women in politics, and we need democratic renewal to make that happen. I think we would all agree on that. OK, we all agree that we've got a problem with that.

But I would say to those who spoke in defence of the Liberals coming forward with this one little piece of a huge piece of electoral reform that we need to do, that it's not me who is being disingenuous; it's the Liberals who have been disingenuous on this. You can't pluck one small piece of democratic renewal, electoral reform, and say, "Oh, we're going to hold this up as our flagship piece here," picking a date, which is fraught with problems if the other pieces aren't attached to it. It's not just me—

Interjections.

Ms Churley: They're saying, "We're going to do it later." Why not start the process now? What are we waiting for? People want to see this process. You know what we have to ask people. Why take this one little piece out and hold it up as the flagship? It's seen as popular out there, but people have to understand that when you delve into the implications of going forward with this without the other companion pieces, it actually can make things worse, and it's not just me saying that.

Mr Hampton: I'm all for Gordon Campbell's fixed election date.

Ms Churley: Gordon Campbell, the Liberals in BC, fixed election; right.

I would say again to the government that this bill should now be withdrawn and should be part of a bigger piece of democratic renewal when they bring it forward, if they do.

1700

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I will be sharing my time with the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell. I will be delighted to share time, and I look forward to hearing his wise words as one who has been here for some time.

I want to say quite candidly at the outset that this piece of legislation doesn't cover the waterfront that we need to cover, and there's a reason for that. We believe that before you bring legislation into the House, particularly legislation that deals with important democratic changes, we owe it to the Ontario constituency to consult and actually be out there and have them help us frame the legislation we want to bring forward, and we intend to do that.

Mr Hampton: Will this be like your budget consultation?

Mr McMeekin: If it were, it would be a great model. I can tell the member opposite that without any shadow of a doubt.

We believe in being consultative and deliberative about our democracy. Levels of confidence and trust in political decision-making are waning, and we have a public that is increasingly disengaged, cynical and even apathetic about the political system. Citizens feel excluded from the process. They don't believe that elections really matter any more or that their votes count. They see lobby groups and special interests that appear in many instances to be dominating debate, and that worries them.

The crux of our democratic challenge, from my perspective, requires strong political leadership that's committed to opening up and democratizing policy formation. I did some graduate work in social policy development and my master's thesis was on participatory democracy, particularly as it relates to social housing policy, so I have done a little bit of background on this. Out of that, I have a sense that not only is real reform needed, but we need reform that will foster genuine interest and activism in political life by future generations and the potential leaders of tomorrow. I think that's a goal we should all strive for here.

Recently, based on citizen consultation in my own riding—we do something very interesting in Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot. I have a series of listening advisory groups: one on the environment, one on education, one on health care; we have a youth group, and I meet with a group of young people every six weeks to get their perspective; and, based on my new responsibilities with seniors, a seniors' listening and advisory group.

Mr Hampton: Do you talk about the budget?

Mr McMeekin: Well, we do that too. We had several meetings on the difficult situation we found ourselves in, I say to the member opposite.

I find that being deliberative about democratic processes in my own riding makes me a better MPP. It give me an opportunity to share and to hear. Twice a year we hold a constituent assembly. The only limit is that we limit it to the first 100 people who register. We use an open concept, with some professional facilitators to help gauge where people are. I share that because, as important as this legislation is in fulfilling our commitment around fixed dates, I believe, and I said this in the House the other day, that by itself it's a very tepid start. But I know from the discussions we've had—and I've been offering some feedback to the Attorney General and his parliamentary assistant—that we have a number of ideas we'll be pushing forward with.

For example, I quote from a paper I wrote recently on this very topic: "In the Liberal government's platform entitled, 'Government that Works for You,' we delineate how the governing party will go about 'strengthening our democracy.' One component of this plan is to conduct open public debate on voting reform. The government is committed to increasing voter turnout by" at least "10%. This includes a debate and subsequent referendum on whether the existing voting system should continue or be replaced by another system," ie proportional representation, preferential ballot or, in my view, a combination of the two.

I think the first-past-the-post system, to be guaranteed a little bit more integrity, ought to move to a preferential ballot. I think that would be of some assistance. In my own view, based on consultations with my constituents, I would like to see another 25 seats added here in the Legislative Assembly, with seats—

Interjection.

Mr McMeekin: They probably would be Liberal seats, given the previous turnout, but based on every 4% or greater part thereof that people receive. So when people went to vote, they'd actually cast two ballots. One would be for the first-past-the-post and the other would be for a political party. A prescribed list is the way it works in a number of European democracies—a list of people, I would venture to suggest, who might not ever get elected in a first-past-the-post system but would make great cabinet ministers in any government.

Let me continue. In addition, there is a commitment to make government agencies and appointments more accountable by empowering a legislative committee to question leaders of government agencies on an annual basis; publicly disclosed annual salaries to government agencies, commissions, boards and employees; and making all agencies subject to the freedom of information act. Those would all be significant changes.

Mr Hampton: I want to know how many seats you'd give to the Fiberals.

Mr McMeekin: As well, the government vows—well, you can do the math—to limit the amount of money political parties can raise and spend in political campaigns, ban self-promotional government advertising schemes and require ministers to attend question period, with fines set out for those who do not meet the two-thirds attendance criteria. On a good day, most members opposite would wax on about these very kinds of issues.

Moreover, the Liberal government has stated that it intends to look into the implementation of citizen juries; Internet voting by bank-machine-style voting kiosks in public places initially, and, over a period of time, to move to the Internet—there are some security issues there that need to be worked on; mandated public consultation on all major legislation; and fixed dates for election, which is what we're debating here today—every four years, as I think Minister Peters was saying. I think it's every four years, Steve, isn't it, that we intend to do that?

Hon Mr Peters: That's right.

Mr McMeekin: So we're anxious to see that move forward.

Furthermore, members of provincial Parliament—at least non-cabinet members—would be free to criticize and vote against government bills. These measures are currently underway to effectively usher in a new democratic era in the province of Ontario. With these actions and the establishment of constituent assemblies across the province—and, I would recommend to the members who are still in the House, constituent assemblies right in the local constituency. Parliamentary reform in and of itself, unless we are, as Gandhi says, actually living and mirroring the kinds of lives, the kinds of processes we want, will be less meaningful than on a good day we'd want it to be. Those constituent assemblies will be very important, and we're working hard on that. With these actions across the province, we believe that we can respond to citizen apathy and scepticism concerning political affairs and bring a sense of new optimism to this important debate.

The ability to conduct face-to-face debate on local issues always needs to be looked at as the way to bring back real accountability to government and to heighten citizen trust of our elected officials. These processes will help us to mitigate the problems of pessimism, cynicism and apathy in our present system, and it's hoped—I sincerely hope—that as we continue to discuss the merits of deliberative democracy, more people will enter the debate, and true civic engagement, which I think is the goal we all share here, will in fact ensue.

I'm pleased to offer those brief thoughts as I stand in my place to support this initial launching pin of a deliberative, democratic process that will see the kinds of change throughout Ontario that on a good day, free of vigorous partisan debate, we would all in our heart of hearts admit we'd like to see.

1710

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): It is with pleasure that I take part in the debate on this very important bill, Bill 86.

The McGuinty government wants to eliminate the waste of taxpayers' money. Also, there will be no more

partisan, self-promotional government advertising. After the passing of this bill, we will be sure that the election will come up every four years. Right now, the next election is scheduled for October 4, 2007. Also, the Premier will have a set date, which will give us 28 full days of campaigning. As it is right now, the Premier could call an election and give the people 56 days of campaigning. It doesn't mean we will not campaign during the summer of 2007, but officially you won't be able to come out with all your posters all over the place.

It is a very important bill. We know that there are many parts of that bill which are very important, really. The first one is to eliminate waste of taxpayers' money. The second one is having competent people in place for the election.

What we went through in this past election—I remember having the regional chief returning officer in my office two days prior to May 17. He came to my office and said, "Mr Lalonde, I was just on the phone and they told me we have to have all our offices open by May 17." Immediately, he was looking for spaces. Depending on the size of your riding—my riding, from one end to the other, is about 160 kilometres, so it means they have to open up four electoral offices. That is the first one. They start going around looking for offices, and the people who had that space for rent say, "When would you like to have it?" "Well, we don't know. We think the election might be called on May 17, so we would need it within two weeks." So the chief returning officer for the region, Mr Brunet, went around and rented space all over my riding. They did the same thing in the whole province. They rented the space and the equipment and they hired the staff. To my knowledge, it came to over $30 million of taxpayers' expenses wasted.

Second, you always look for the competent people to work there. Many of those people are not retired yet, they are not on Ontario Works, so really they are people who have a steady job. In the Ottawa area, a lot of them work for the federal government or the provincial government and take time off, so they have to ask for permission to take the time off.

I remember that in 1994, when I was selected at the nomination convention, at which we had over 5,200 people in the small village of St Isidore, with a population of 700, I ran. I was retired, so I had time. But I'm looking at my friend Phil McNeely, from Ottawa-Orléans. He was a councillor in the city of Ottawa and didn't know if he was going to run in the next municipal election.

So some of the people have a full-time job as a federal civil servant or they have a permanent job, and all of a sudden, after they run for the nomination, they have to leave their job. When I ran for the federal government, I had to take time off without pay. You can take time off without pay for a year, the way it is going at the present time.

This bill will eliminate all this waste of taxpayers' money and the waste of people's time, really, that they have to take time off.

Another situation that I went through in the last election, and I'm sure it was the same thing all over Ontario, was that I went into a place that was not accessible for handicapped people. They couldn't find a place at the last minute. They had found one, but at the last minute the places that they had found, three of those places, were rented out to other people. So do you know what they had to do to go and vote? They had to call the people from inside, people in wheelchairs having to vote outside the polling station, and then the people had to walk back in there. I said, "This is unbelievable," what I just noticed in this provincial election. "Well, they had no choice." They had no choice. This is the way they had to do it.

We made a promise during the last election campaign, and we are keeping our promise. When I say we are keeping our promise, we are keeping our promise on something that we control. The people are saying, "You are raising taxes." We are raising taxes—do you remember last week, last Wednesday, on the front lawn? They had a big sign, "The Lying King." Do you know who was "The Lying King"? It was certainly not our leader; somebody else was.

The Deputy Speaker: I remind the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell that we can't say anything indirectly that we are not allowed to say directly. So I would ask you to—well, I will warn you at this point, but keep that in mind.

Mr Lalonde: It's a very popular movie here in Toronto. I will withdraw my word, Mr Speaker, and make sure I don't repeat that. But again, we saw all sorts of signs on the front lawn: "No more taxes. No more taxes." We didn't raise the taxes for the purpose of raising the taxes; it is because we had to balance the books that were left in a big, bad situation by the former government.

We could have done the same thing as when the Tories took over from the NDP: slashing down health care, slashing down education and downloading everything to the municipality. We said, "We cannot do that to Ontarians." We are a party that does believe in the future of our kids, and this is what we have done.

Also with this bill, knowing that we will be having the election every four years, nobody, no other government, will be able to do as this past government did and leave the books in the situation that we got them in. We have a Bill 18 that is very clear. The Auditor General will make sure that whatever the government or the parties are preaching about has some real truth to talk about. Bill 18 is very clear. Bill 18, sections 10 and 11: "Every ministry of the public service, every agency of the crown, every crown controlled corporation and every grant recipient shall give the Auditor General the information regarding its powers, duties, activities, organization, financial transactions and methods of business that the Auditor General believes to be necessary to perform his or her duties under this act."

This is the end of what we have gone through. This is why we couldn't come up with a balanced budget, because the former government left us in a mess. They blamed the NDP in the past when they took over, but this is worse than the NDP. They left this government with

$139 billion of deficit. When they took over, it was $91 billion. So you mean to say that those people knew how to administer a government? I don't think so.

But before my time runs out, I want to say that this is the best bill. I have to congratulate our Attorney General for coming up so soon with this bill, and also our Premier. He said, "I made a promise that the election would take place every four years from now on," and we will have the next election on October 4, 2007. This is what the people of Ontario want. We have been listening to them, and that is what we will do.

1720

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the address of the honourable members. In principle, I don't have a great number of problems with the idea of having fixed election dates. In fact, if there's anything positive to be said about it, the people of Ontario will actually know how long they're going to be afflicted with this government. So they'll know that on October 4, 2007, they're going to be able to say goodbye to the current government.

Part of the reason for them bringing in this legislation is that they had to have something on which to spend the summer going around saying, "We are fulfilling our promises." It's an easy one to fulfill because it doesn't add to the picture of mismanagement that they're portraying and painting across the province of Ontario right now.

The honourable members wanted to talk more about their excuses for the budget that they tabled on May 18. They wanted to spend more time talking about that than they did the actual bill that is before the House right now. So perhaps I could respond to that for a second because that is the crux of the problem here. They keep trying to make excuses for the mistakes they made, but the people of Ontario will not be fooled. They see the numbers and they see what this government is doing to them. They see the way they're dipping their hand into the pocket and taking out their hard-earned money.

So that's the message that the people of Ontario are going to be hearing throughout this summer. That's the message they're going to be sending back to the Liberal government. When we come back in September, we'll be debating this bill again, I'm sure.

Mr Hampton: It's really hard to figure out why the government wants to make such a big deal out of this bill. As I've already pointed out, this doesn't change the constitution of Ontario. This doesn't prevent the Premier of the day from, at any point in time, going down the hall, seeing the Lieutenant Governor, and saying, "I want you to dissolve the Legislature and hold an election." It doesn't prevent the government of the day from engineering a non-confidence situation, losing a non-confidence vote and having an early election. It doesn't prevent any of those things. In fact, legally and constitutionally, this bill does nothing.

If the Premier wants to make another promise, if he wants to promise that the next election will be held the first week of October in 2007, then just go out and make the promise. Because that's all there is in this bill. This bill doesn't do anything legally; it doesn't do anything constitutionally; it doesn't prevent an early election from being held and it doesn't prevent the Premier from conniving to hold an early election; it doesn't do any of those things.

This is simply a promise that you're trying to truss up, dress up and make out to be something big. It's simply the Premier promising people that the next election will be held the first week of October 2007. So get on with it. Make the promise, publicize the promise and then let's deal with some real legislation, some legislation that actually creates a legal requirement or creates some legal rights. This doesn't. This is simply another promise by the Premier and he's trying to dress it up as if it were a law.

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise on Bill 86 and comment on the presentations given by the members for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot and Glengarry-Prescott-Russell. Both members made very salient facts and points to the issue of Bill 86 and what is contained in it.

First and foremost, I think members are asking why we are so pleased about this bill and why we're so excited about it. First of all, it is the content of the bill, and that is that election dates will be held on the first Thursday of October here in the province of Ontario.

I think it was raised previously by my colleague, but I want to reiterate as well that, in the past, prior to the 1995 election, I was nominated in 1994. I started campaigning for the nomination within our party apparatus some time prior to that. So I was nominated in July 1994. People were speculating that Bob Rae would go to the polls very shortly; however, we all know that didn't happen, and I was a candidate for almost a year because the election didn't happen until 1995.

I know other members in this place experienced the same thing in the run-up to the last election; some were candidates for much longer. It is very difficult on families to put one's life aside for that length of time. This will actually help the opposition in Ontario from this time on, in that they will know when the election is. They will be able to seek out candidates and say: "We know that the election in Ontario will be the first week of October. You need not put your life on hold for a year and a half, seeking a nomination under the speculation that a Premier holds over the opposition parties." I would think they would be very pleased at the opportunities of recruitment that are availed to them.

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I look forward to the opportunity to rise and speak on a couple of comments regarding Bill 86. Personally, I'm not supportive of this, as mentioned by my colleagues here. According to the Constitution, there are up to five years in each of the provinces that we have this ability. Our system is based on a British system that is very much different from what is coming forward as a Americanized date-setting sort of principle.

I would hope the members are very well aware of what took place when—I know it was Minister Kerrio at the time who was at a function in Kenora with the Outdoor Writers of America. He looked over and mentioned, "You realize that Peterson is about to call a provincial election." It was Minister Bradley at the time who was very adamant that we're going to catch them off guard and was going to make it happen. Look what happened there when they tried to move forward. Those are the political opportunities that you take.

If the people think you're doing the right job and if it's the way to move forward, then that's the way it will happen. What happens in the case of a minority government when you are not functioning in an adequate way? Normally minority governments are very quick to turn over.

I know the member spoke about the changes and what is taking place regarding finances, yet they made a 3% increase announcement with millions of dollars announced again today. So there are a lot of things in there that have to be addressed, and I'm trying to respond to a lot of these issues.

As well, the member from Kenora-Rainy River said that if people want it, just set the date. I'm in full agreement. If that is what the people want, then set the date and move ahead with that. Another government will come in, just as this government has, and change the legislation and make it not happen. If it is against the Constitution, it shouldn't be happening.

In closing, I would like to say that it was a member who was sitting in this Legislature, who was on TVO, who was very much opposed to it because of the Americanization of the Parliament of the province of Ontario. Who was saying that on TVO but Sean Conway.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot has two minutes to reply.

Mr McMeekin: I want to thank my esteemed colleague from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, who always brings a real note of wisdom to the debate here, and also the members for Oshawa, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Kenora-Rainy River and Chatham-Kent Essex.

I remember the story of the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland, where Alice arrives and says, "Mr Cheshire Cat, which way should I go?" And he says, "That depends where you are going. Do you know where you are going?" She says "No, I don't." The Cheshire Cat says, "Well, it doesn't matter much which way you go then, does it?" I want to tell you that we know where we're going. The journey is always shorter when you do know where you're going.

These are some important first steps that we are taking. They are incredibly important steps predicated on this government having the right look in its eye. You can't do anything these days without having the right look in your eye, and we do. George Will, the famous US political commentator, once wisely observed, "The constituency that holds its elected officials in contempt will not long respect itself." I believe that many of the constituents across Ontario do, in fact, hold this place and many of the elected officials in contempt. I think we need to start to turn that around. We need to start to restore the integrity and respect for this place, to see a return to stability and civility, particularly in this people's place.

It's important that we start here. It's important that we build confidence. It's important that we pass this first step about fixed election dates, and then we'll get on with the wider agenda.

1730

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to respond for a few minutes on Bill 86, An Act to amend the Election Act, the Election Finances Act, the Legislative Assembly Act and the Representation Act, 1996, to provide for provincial general elections at intervals of approximately four years, to govern the timing of writs, close of nominations and polling day, to make modifications relating to the electoral readjustment process, and to make technical amendments. That's quite a mouthful of a bill.

As many people have said here today, it's interesting that there's so much interest all of a sudden from the government to pass this piece of legislation. I listened to the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell's comments, and different members over there have made a few comments in the Qs and As and in their speeches, and the one thing I'm really concerned about is that with all the arguments they use to actually pass this bill, I can't understand why their federal cousins—Paul Martin and the federal government—have not done it. If it's so important, with all the excuses they've used for passing this bill, like opening up Elections Ontario offices and hiring people, why would Paul Martin not have done this already and shown leadership across our great country? If it's costing extra money and they're wasting taxpayer dollars in Ontario, imagine what it costs to do what Mr Martin has been doing for the last year in all of our country, where we have 306 ridings, I believe. Why is that?

I call this bill the Ernie Eves election day act, as the last Premier to have the guts to call an election in Ontario. There's no question, Ernie Eves called an election. Obviously you don't have confidence in your leader, and I don't know why that would be. I don't know why anyone wouldn't have confidence in the Premier, but this government doesn't even have confidence in the Premier.

I'll tell you why they want this bill passed: It's Greg Sorbara's bill. Greg Sorbara had a private member's bill and we called it—and Mr Sorbara went out of his mind when we debated this in the House—the "Americanization of Ontario politics" by holding elections every four years. That's what we called it. Mr Sorbara got almost violent in the House, yelling and screaming one day. The fact of the matter is—

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: I'm hearing lots of heckling now. I'm just trying to make my speech. I didn't heckle any of you

folks when you spoke, but here you are back again, heckling me. I don't know what I do to deserve all this heckling.

It's Mr Sorbara's bill. We all know who the real leader is over there: It's the Minister of Finance. He wants his little private member's bill, which he introduced I believe in the spring of 2002, passed. That was his reintroduction into the House. He wants set election dates passed. Of course, it is one election promise. Let's give him credit. Of the hundreds he made, of the letters he wrote, it is one election promise. Mr McGuinty can go to every barbecue all summer and spend the whole summer talking about keeping those election promises—a set election date.

Of course, we're not going support this nonsense. I'm not going to support it, that's for sure. Because you know what? In the end it means nothing. Mr Hampton, the member for Rainy River, laid it out very clearly. The Premier can call it whenever he wants. Let's say, for example, he's having a very difficult year financially. Let's say it's the spring of 2007 and he's made a bunch of announcements on hospitals and we're heading toward that fall election. He can walk down the hall and tell the Lieutenant Governor to call the election in the spring of 2007. It's as plain and simple as that. This bill allows him to do that. Now, if I'm wrong on that, I would really appreciate some clarification from the government.

The other people who need this bill are the Attorney General and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. They're supposed to be the justice ministers? They have introduced no bills. My colleague for Waterloo-Wellington has a lot of comments on that, the two-hatters, that he'll bring out later on. But the bottom line is, neither Mr Kwinter nor Mr Bryant have really laid out any piece of legislation. I was used to working with a government and with a person like Mr Flaherty, the former Attorney General, and Mr David Young. They brought out legislation. We debated legislation in this House. What's Mr Bryant doing, the minister of democratic renewal? We can get to democratic renewal in a second. We've witnessed democratic renewal this afternoon in your vote, closing down debate on second reading of the elections bill.

The fact of the matter is, Mr Bryant has really brought no legislation forward, so this is maybe his claim to fame. So he can go out on the barbecue circuit this summer and he can probably drop around to all the different ridings, maybe take a trip into my riding or to those of some of the other folks out there, and he can brag to the riding associations about all the legislation that he's passed—a fixed election bill.

I give him credit for trying it, and maybe in the end—it doesn't mean a lot to me. Since 1980, I've been involved in municipal politics. I know what a fixed election date is. I have no problems, whether it's four years or five years, but it's the way it's being brought forward. Here's a government that has been just pounded by the media, pounded by the constituents, the polling across our province, and they have to have something kind of good to talk about. So they're going to talk a little bit about their fixed election date, an election promise that they plan on keeping.

It gets me back for a moment to the ministry responsible for democratic renewal, the Attorney General's office. I'd like to talk a little bit about democratic renewal. I thought the way he was talking—when I heard the House leader's comments over the last few weeks and I heard that there would be no more time allocation in this House, I heard that would be the end of public meetings—excuse me a second. What's that?

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: I just want to talk a little bit about democratic renewal and time allocation. As we talked a little bit about the 2004 budget, we were told about this open government, how new and open they were, the consultation process, the Ministry of Finance committee going out there, the town hall meetings, the pre-budget consultations by a private company—which were untendered—that did all the background work. The government was responsible. They were going to eliminate government advertising and non-partisan advertising.

Wow, what a disappointment. Didn't the budget bill tell everybody everything they wanted to hear? For a government that bragged about going out to the public for consultations, we in this House rang the bells for five nights on second reading of Bill 83 for one reason: We wanted more hearings after second reading. That bill should be presented to the people of Ontario throughout the summer. You had a couple of amendments here last week and you turned those down too. And today you passed second reading after time allocating the bill. Now the people of Ontario are going to get a total of, what, six hours on an $80-billion budget that is the most draconian budget, the most damaging budget that the Ontario taxpayers have seen—

Mr Yakabuski: And not really popular either.

Mr Dunlop: Well, no. I know that 71 people think it's okay. No, there's 70, because Kim Craitor hates it. He didn't show up for the vote today. We know—

1740

The Deputy Speaker: I really don't have to remind the member about naming members who aren't here, do I?

Mr Dunlop: What I was trying to say was—OK; I won't go there.

The bottom line is, we know that the members of the government do not support their own budget. So even if we exaggerate, we can say that approximately 71 people in Ontario like the budget, of 12 million, because I can tell you, there are a lot of Liberals out there, federally and provincially, who do not like this budget. Guess who they're going to take it out on? The same guy who hasn't got the courage to show fixed election dates federally. The guy's name is Paul Martin.

That takes us to the federal leadership and how they have interfered in our process here and the impact the Premier's budget has had on the federal leadership, because there's a guy who talked about an election date. He got elected, I believe, last fall, in November, when Mr

Martin took over the leadership of our country: 51% support in the polls, arrogance like you wouldn't believe. The Harper campaign was nobody, Tony Clement was nobody, and all of a sudden, here we are, only eight months later, and guess what? Paul Martin's behind in the polls as a result of that guy right over there, Dalton McGuinty, particularly here in the province of Ontario.

My guess is that Mr Martin will lose the election. It could be a minority Harper government, but I'm hoping for a Harper majority government, because they've kept a clean campaign. If Mr Harper decides on fixed election dates, then he'll do it for all of the country, and that's the kind of leadership we need. We don't need one province at a time bringing in Mickey Mouse legislation to make their Premier look good. We need federal leadership on this issue if it's going to happen anywhere. If there are going to be fixed election dates, it should happen at the federal level and then trickle down from there. I'm guessing people support me on that; I don't know.

I did want to talk a little bit about what people are saying out there. I haven't had anybody come to me in my riding and talk about fixed election dates. Hands up if they've had fixed election dates as an issue in their riding. OK. At the very back. I guess it's a big thing over in—OK. So there are 71 people who have had this problem.

You know what they're talking about in my riding? I think they're talking about the health care premium. They're talking about delisting of some services. Anybody guess what they would be? Perhaps chiropractic, physiotherapy, optometry. That's what the people are talking about in the riding of Simcoe North. Not one person has e-mailed me or sent me a mean letter, anything like that, saying, "Boy, you'd better support that fixed election date. That's really important in my life." Not one person.

If anything, there's one thing that's really good about this bill: We know when Dalton McGuinty is going to go out. That's the good thing about the bill. We know it'll be on October 4, 2007. That's when we'll actually see, on Ernie Eves day, 2007, the end of Dalton McGuinty—unless, of course, there's a leadership review. My guess is, there will be a leadership review on the Liberal side. There are lots of good candidates over there. Mr Brown would make a great one. I'm sorry, I forget all the ridings, and I know I'm supposed to mention the ridings. The Minister of Transportation would make a—

The Deputy Speaker: When it comes to Mr Brown, I'll allow you to say that.

Mr Dunlop: The Minister of Transportation would make a great Premier some day, maybe 30 years down the road, but the bottom line is that we will know the end of Dalton McGuinty. It'll be October 4, 2007—unless, of course, there is a leadership review. You know Liberals: They like leadership reviews. They sure do. Remember Martin, the man who wanted to be Prime Minister for the next 10 years who won't be any more in another month? That's what we've got here. But the bottom line is that—

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: I'm hearing some heckling over there about September 18, but we on this side of the House have a good feeling about this particular Parliament. It wasn't easy to come in here, having been in government for almost eight a half years and to lose in the last election. We went out to the people of Ontario. We campaigned hard. We thought we had put a good platform across, and do you know what? The people didn't buy it, because someone else went out there with another platform, a whole bunch of promises to the people of Ontario, and they've set a new bar for what people think of politicians here in Ontario. Of course, those are the broken promises that we talk of as we work toward the next election.

There is one promise they can keep: fixed election dates. Here we go.

Interjection: They haven't done it yet, you understand that.

Mr Dunlop: They say they're going to pass it, though, and there seem to be a lot of people really encouraged over there. I think they want to do a lot of special press releases. I can just see them all across the GTA, "Dalton keeps his promise for the fixed election date," hoping that everyone will forget about the health premium. Isn't that what this is all about? Do you guys talk about this in caucus? Give us a nod if you do. I'm sure you do. Oh, you don't talk about it. I know you've had a bunch of messaging around the budget; there's no question about that. How do I sell this budget? How do I get rid of these petitions that are coming into my office? How do I do all these things? I'd really like to know what kind of advice you get as you try to move this thing through the House.

We won't be supporting this bill, mainly because we want more committee hearings, guys. A lot of our caucus members might like parts—you're the government and you don't to give us committee hearings on the budget. As a result of that, I don't think we're going to get a lot of co-operation between now and the end of the session, whether that session ends on June 24 or on August 24. If you want to come back in the summer, we're ready to come back. I'll tell you that right now. We'll be back here to debate whatever you want to debate. But because of the lack of committee hearings, we cannot support legislation you're putting through right now. It's very backward, and I think we've seen it all.

We think the budget has had such a negative impact on the citizens of our province and on many of our small communities. We talk about all the wonderful things you're doing across the province. What are they? The people don't believe you. You're going to have to do a lot of really special announcements between now and the next few months to change the feelings of the general public out there. The public in Ontario that I talk to, the people in my riding, the people I talk to in Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, the riding of my colleague Joe Tascona—I have a lot of colleagues there. We share a lot of the same communities of interest, and they're very concerned. As a result, we're seeing that in our federal election campaign. I'm seeing in my riding a momentum.

We started out with a candidate who was not very well known in the Conservative Party, up against a federal incumbent. I think it's going to be very tight now, and at the beginning of this process, at the beginning of the campaign, it may not have been that way. Now we're seeing this negative impact of the McGuinty budget, of the broken promises, of one thing after another, where the people just do not believe this government any more.

Think of it: In that time, you've already lost a by-election. The by-election went before the budget. Can you imagine what would happen if you called a by-election today? I bet you McGuinty would lose his own riding today. The Premier of the province would lose his own riding if there was a by-election called there today, or any cabinet minister over there would lose.

Look at what's happening in Windsor. The support in Windsor, which has always been either a New Democratic town or a Liberal town, is now showing strong support, federally, for the Conservative candidates, all three of them.

As we go through this process and as we talk more about democratic renewal and fixed election dates and all these things, keep in mind that what people are really concerned about in Ontario today is not fixed election dates; it's keeping your promises. Clearly, the number one promise that Mr McGuinty made to the people of Ontario was, "I will not raise your taxes"—end of story. Now that's history. That means nothing.

I've heard him flounder around over there for three weeks, talking about all the reasons he put in the increase in taxes, and people aren't buying it. They're not buying the deficit garbage argument any more.

1750

You took over the government with six months remaining in the year and you've done nothing. You've done nothing, the same as the Attorney General has done nothing, except bring out this Mickey Mouse bill. That's what he's done.

I know my time's almost at an end here. I was going leave 17 seconds for my friend Tascona, but he'll speak another night on this bill. I just want to say what an honour it is to speak here. I will not be supporting this bill until you do something with that budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Churley: I spoke for an hour earlier on this. I'm sure everybody here was listening with rapt attention. I spoke very much about the need to reform the system, and that this bill before us today, with just fixing an election date, is not adequate. When cherry-picked out of the whole basket—I'm mixing my metaphors here—of changes that we need to make to reform our political system, it is really dangerous to take one piece and go with it, and without reforming the rest.

Although I agree with many things the member for Simcoe North had to say about where the Liberals are now and the broken promises, the deficit that the Tories said they didn't have but the Liberals knew they did have, as we did, but they wouldn't admit it—ah, the tangled web we weave to get elected. That's one of the reasons we have to change the system.

An editorial in the Toronto Star expressed some of the concerns my party and I had after we took a look at the bill. They say, "It is a precise date that we don't ... need. Keeping a campaign promise"—which right now is big for the Liberals because there are so few kept—"Premier Dalton McGuinty is changing Ontario's rules so elections will occur every four years," blah, blah, blah. It says, "In the US, that fixed election date results in long, grinding and outrageously expensive campaigns. Some prospective candidates are on the hustings years before voting day."

It goes on to say, "Provincial elections are high-stakes, hard-fought affairs. There's a real risk that our system of relatively brief campaigning ... will be replaced by year-long contests that will sap and exhaust public interest." It goes on to say, "Governments will still be tempted by self-interest. They will likely dole out favours, and delay unpopular decisions, in the run-up to election day. Fed-up electors facing achingly long campaigns, full of puffery and promises, might spurn the system in ever-greater numbers." So there are serious concerns with this bill.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I really enjoyed the member for Simcoe North's version of Grimm's Fairy Tales. I have to tell you that I spent last summer and certainly last fall debating the Tory budget under the leadership of Janet Ecker. Throughout that time frame, into August and September, she was just adamant that there was no deficit. That was a balanced budget. The $2 billion in asset sales or leases were completely undisclosed, no matter how many times she was asked in public settings under debate, "What are the assets you plan to sell or lease?" This is a balanced budget; there were no answers. I know that the members opposite would very much like the world to think that the budget they had was going to work, but it didn't. The finance minister couldn't defend it.

Let me tell you that I'd like to have more time to speak specifically to Bill 86. The public is going to be very happy with fixed election dates, so they know when the election is going to be called. We may even be able to engage people in that process.

But since the opposition at this point would like to talk more about what they think the objective is, let me just remind them that not only are we going keep a commitment to a fixed election date; we've kept commitments to hire more meat inspectors. Not only are we going to keep a commitment to fixed election dates; we've kept commitments to hiring more water inspectors. Not only are we going to keep a commitment to fixed election dates; we've scrapped the private school tax credits. Not only are we going keep a commitment to fixed election dates; we've frozen tuitions. Not only are we going to keep fixed election dates; we've restored local democracy to our school boards. Not only are we going to keep our commitment to fixed election dates; we've provided support for child care. Not only are we going to keep our commitment to fixed election dates; we've increased the minimum wage. I could probably take the 20 minutes to wrap up all the—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Tascona: I'm very pleased to comment on the debate of the member from Simcoe North.

I think one thing that has to be pointed out here is on page 4 of the act: subsection 44.1(5). This is supposed to be a fixed election date of October 4, 2007, yet what they have in here is dealing with the automatic dissolution of old associations. It provides that they either dissolve in the year before October 4, 2007, or if an election is called at a date other than October 4, 2007. So it's exactly what we've been talking about. There is no fixed election date here. It allows the government to shut down the Legislature at any time they feel they want to call an election. I think it's misleading with respect to the interpretation. You've got to read page 4, subsection 44.1(5), because you can drive a truck through that commitment of fixed election dates.

But I think you have to go back to the debate yesterday on the CBC cross-country program where the NDP candidate; the Conservative Party candidate, Patrick Brown; and the Green Party all committed to fixed-term election dates, and yet the federal Liberal candidate, Aileen Carroll, speaking on behalf of the federal Liberals, basically said there would be no commitment whatsoever from the Paul Martin government. Why? Because if you bring in fixed-term elections, that takes the power away from the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will have all that power to determine when they want to call the election. And believe me, there was a lot of fooling around and a lot of gerrymandering with respect to the calling of this particular election, so no wonder Paul Martin doesn't want anyone taking away his power to call an election.

The Deputy Speaker: Further questions and comments? The member from Scarborough—don't help me. Scarborough Southwest. I was on the right track.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): It's a pleasure to comment briefly. I had an opportunity last week to speak to this bill.

I think the member from Simcoe North brought up some interesting points that are worth debating and discussing, but what I'm a bit concerned about is his criticism of our government and what we're attempting to do here. A number of promises have been fulfilled. I don't know if he can hear me or listen at this point in time, but he did mention in his speech that he was in municipal politics since 1980. When he gets a chance to do his summation, I'd like to know if he ever raised taxes when he was reeve or was in the position of mayor—or I don't know what he did at the municipal level. I was a city councillor and also had a municipal life. He's constantly pointing the finger, saying Dalton McGuinty broke his promise about, "I will not raise taxes." I would like to know, hopefully when he responds, whether or not he ever raised taxes in his time as a municipal reeve or mayor back in his hometown.

Dalton McGuinty, at the time he came to power, didn't know that he was going to face a $5.6-billion deficit. We've heard now that John Tory, probably the next leader of the party, and Mr Flaherty have indicated that perhaps their party wasn't forthcoming, that their finance minister wasn't forthcoming. That's where the misinformation started, and the Premier had to deal with that misinformation. There are admissions now being made by potential leaders of this party, and I can't wait, when this House resumes in the fall, to hear from the new leader and to see what position they take about the finances of the government prior to this Liberal government taking office.

I thank you for the opportunity to comment in these two minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes to reply.

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond to the comments made by the member from Toronto-Danforth; the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge; the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, my colleague; and the member from Scarborough Southwest.

In summary, I'd just like to say that I don't intend to support this piece of legislation. I think the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford summed it up best when he said we needed to see the federal leadership actually come through with this first. If I saw a federal Prime Minister set the bar and follow the same kind of legislation, then I can imagine all the territories and the other eight provinces would follow through. That's why I would like to see it.

It's hard for me to listen to the Liberals put this legislation through when their federal cousins are ignoring it. And they are ignoring it, because Mr Martin has followed that same pattern since last November. There are people who think Mr Martin should have called the election before Christmas last year or very early in the spring. Of course, he has waited and watched the polling. When the sponsorship scandal hit, he knew full well he had a problem. That's why he didn't put it off, because as time went on, we knew more and more negative facts were going to come out about the sponsorship scandal. So he immediately went to the polls for a June 28 election, and as a result, we'll see what happens in the next few days. But I would like to see the federal leadership on this particular issue.

In the end, it's like I said earlier: I want to call this the Ernie Eves election day act, because if this bill is passed, history will show that Ernie Eves was the last Premier who had the courage to call an election. I want to put that on the record: Ernie Eves, the last Premier to call an election, who had the courage to do it.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1801.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 14 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 14 juin 2004

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO HERITAGE AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE PATRIMOINE DE L'ONTARIO

Mrs Meilleur moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 60, An Act to amend the Ontario Heritage Act / Projet de loi 60, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario.

Hon Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Mr Speaker, the amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act that this government introduced on April 21 would significantly change the way Ontario protects its heritage. The current Ontario Heritage Act is weak and outdated, and the proposed amendments would, if passed, bring Ontario's heritage legislation in line with leading jurisdictions in North America. Without strong and expanded heritage protection laws, valuable heritage resources and the opportunities they represent will continue to be lost.

Les modifications apportées par notre gouvernement à la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario introduites le 21 avril modifieront radicalement le mode de protection du patrimoine en Ontario. La Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario, sous sa forme actuelle, est faible et désuète. Les modifications proposées, si elles sont adoptées, permettront aux lois sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario de correspondre davantage à celles des compétences d'Amérique du Nord qui sont des chefs de file en la matière. Sans des lois fortes et ambitieuses sur la protection du patrimoine, des ressources patrimoniales inestimables et les opportunités qu'elles représentent continueront de disparaître.

Many people across the province clearly support the proposed amendments. They say we have seen too many of our irreplaceable buildings fall victim to the wrecker's ball. Ontario's heritage sites give us a sense of place and help us build pride in our own communities. Heritage organizations, municipalities, and museums in small towns and big cities alike are commending the government for the proposed amendments. In fact, I recently received a letter from an association representing 12 municipal heritage committees in the Niagara region. The letter, dated April 26, says, "We are extremely pleased to note that you have brought forward so quickly after the Liberals took over the governing of Ontario legislation to strengthen the Ontario Heritage Act. You are correct when you say that the act is weak and outdated, and we commend you for moving to strengthen our hands when we at the grassroots are attempting to save Ontario's heritage—built, cultural and natural."

I wanted to say that it's not only people active in the heritage organizations who support this act. I have in the gallery tonight Sandy Smallwood, who is a developer in Ottawa. Sandy has come from Ottawa to be here tonight to listen to the second reading. Mr Smallwood is an example, because he has protected so many precious buildings in Ottawa, and I will name a few: the Wallace House, the Patterson House, Strathcona Apartments and the Windsor Arms. He's a living example that it's well and good for developers to protect heritage, so I wanted to thank him publicly tonight.

1850

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): What's his name again?

Hon Mrs Meilleur: Sandy Smallwood.

Since I introduced the amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act on April 21, newspapers across the province have been reporting numerous stories about residents clamouring to save their local heritage sites or establish heritage districts in their communities.

The people of Ontario are demanding that the Ontario government protect their heritage.

La population de l'Ontario demande que le gouvernement de l'Ontario protège son patrimoine. La conservation du patrimoine de l'Ontario dans l'intérêt des générations actuelles et futures tient à cœur au gouvernement McGuinty, qui a pris un engagement à la matière.

Je voudrais aussi ce soir rendre hommage à mon prédécesseur, qui a travaillé très fort aussi pour préparer cette loi, mais qui malheureusement n'a pas pu se réaliser sous son mandat. Une Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario renforcée, si elle était adoptée, permettrait d'empêcher qu'on démolisse des hauts lieux précieux du patrimoine.

The McGuinty government values and is committed to conserving Ontario's heritage for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations. A stronger Ontario Heritage Act, if passed, would prevent the demolition of Ontario's precious heritage landmarks. A stronger act would also provide more tools and flexibility to protect heritage at the local and provincial levels and would make Ontario one of the leading jurisdictions in

heritage conservation. We listened to our stakeholders and the changes we have introduced in Bill 60 are based on what we heard.

I would like to provide more information to my fellow members about some of the key proposed amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act.

One of the most important changes: New municipal powers to prevent the demolition of heritage properties would give municipalities tools to prevent rather than delay the demolition of heritage properties. These amendments would also ensure that increased demolition control will be balanced with the property owner's rights to a binding appeal.

Another important amendment would, if passed, provide new provincial powers to identify and designate heritage sites of provincial significance, as well as the ability to prohibit the demolition of those sites. Property owners would have the right to a binding appeal in this case as well.

The proposed amendments also provide for clear conservation standards and guidelines to be established for provincially owned or controlled heritage properties, so that the province will lead by example in the stewardship of its own sites.

Other proposed amendments would, if passed, provide greater clarity in the municipal designation process and provide better planning tools for the protection of heritage conservation districts. We are proposing to standardize the criteria for municipal designations of heritage properties and enable municipalities to recognize and list non-designated heritage properties.

The proposed amendments would allow municipal councils to delegate approvals for alterations to designated heritage properties, set minimum maintenance standards for designated properties and easily update existing designation bylaws to comply with the new designation requirements proposed by these amendments.

We would also require public notice of an opportunity to object to all proposals to remove both municipal and provincial heritage property designations. The proposed amendments would require that heritage conservation districts have a plan and guidelines for managing changes to the district.

The proposed amendments would also extend district controls to cover heritage property features such as landscapes as well as buildings. The amendments will also allow minor alterations in districts to be exempted from the requirement of an approval, and enable interim controls for up to a year for districts being considered for designation.

The amendment act would, if passed, increase provincial protection for marine heritage sites. This would enable the province to protect the most significant and fragile marine heritage sites by prescribing these sites in the regulation and prohibiting access without a site-specific licence.

There are also enhanced provisions to conserve unique archaeological resources, such as increasing fines to a maximum of $1 million for the illegal alteration of sites. These provisions would also enable the province to monitor archaeological field work and sites, and provide public access to certain archaeology information collected under the current legislation.

The amended act would also update provisions for the province's heritage agencies to give them greater ability to deliver their mandates. We are proposing to update the procedural powers of the Conservation Review Board, in line with amendments to the Statutory Powers Procedure Act. To address the needs of the board, we also propose that the board be composed of at least five members, rather than the current three members.

The proposed amendment to change the name of the Ontario Heritage Foundation to the Ontario Heritage Trust would better reflect the core nature of the agency's role, holding Ontario's heritage in trust for current and future generations.

La Fondation du patrimoine ontarien est le principal organisme de protection du patrimoine dans la province. Elle œuvre aux quatre coins de la province. Depuis plus de trois décennies, la fondation identifie, préserve, protège et promeut le patrimoine riche et divers de l'Ontario.

La Fondation du patrimoine ontarien rend hommage aux personnages, lieux et événements qui ont façonné, et qui continuent de façonner, notre culture. La fondation détient en fiducie 22 sites du patrimoine et plus de 100 propriétés du patrimoine naturel. Elle détient aussi en fiducie, au nom de la population de l'Ontario, plus de 20 000 objets culturels et plus de 440 000 objets du patrimoine archéologique.

La fondation bâtit des partenariats avec plusieurs partenaires, y compris des comités et des bénévoles qui ont la préservation du patrimoine ontarien à cœur. Elle promeut l'importance de la conservation du patrimoine et encourage les jeunes à s'impliquer dans les activités patrimoniales.

The provincial plaque program is the Ontario Heritage Foundation's oldest and best-known program. Its more than 1,150 blue-and-gold plaques, emblazoned with the provincial coat of arms, promote an understanding of Ontario's past by interpreting significant heritage subjects at locations across the province.

Notre patrimoine divers est aussi célébré par des plaques érigées à Brouage en France, lieu de naissance de Champlain, à Devon en Angleterre, lieu où John Graves Simcoe s'est éteint, et dans 19 autres sites patrimoniaux internationaux.

1900

Perhaps the foundation's best-known restoration project is the renovation of the beautiful Elgin and Winter Garden Theatre. This is the world's only operating double-decker theatre complex. The foundation has restored the building to its original role as an important venue for commercial theatre in Toronto. Other well-known sites held in trust by the foundation for the people of Ontario include the Niagara Apothecary in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Fulford Place in Brockville, and the stately George Brown House on Beverley Street in Toronto.

The foundation also helps ensure that Ontario's wetlands, woodlands, grasslands and geological land formations remain a part of our future. Protected land includes the habitats of endangered species, rare forests, wetlands, sensitive features of the Oak Ridges moraine, nature reserves on the Canadian Shield, and the spectacular Niagara Escarpment.

It was the Ontario Heritage Foundation that launched Doors Open Ontario in 2002, under the leadership of the previous government, to create access to, and awareness and excitement about, our province's heritage. To date, over 700,000 visits have been made to Doors Open Ontario heritage sites. The Doors Open concept continues to spread across North America, with events now being held in Newfoundland and Alberta and, in the US, in Massachusetts, western New York state, New York City and Denver. Every year, Doors Open Ontario attracts large crowds across Ontario. From April to October, residents and visitors are invited to discover first-hand Ontario's hidden heritage treasures, some of which have never been opened to the public. Festival and Events Ontario recognizes Doors Open Ontario as one of the province's top-50 Ontario festivals. That is very much due to the hard work and dedication of the people of the Ontario Heritage Foundation.

Le grand nombre de visiteurs dans les sites de Portes ouvertes et la dizaine d'articles écrits dans les médias récemment à propos des questions touchant le patrimoine témoignent de l'énorme soutien accordé au patrimoine dans toute la province. Nous avons besoin de lois fortes et efficaces pour protéger notre patrimoine.

We need strong and effective laws to protect our heritage. Our heritage expresses our collective experience and values. It gives us insight into who we are and confidence about what we can achieve.

The proposed amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act would provide us with the tools we need to protect our heritage assets, promote civic pride and boost local economic development. Les modifications proposées à la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario nous offriront les outils dont nous avons besoin pour protéger nos biens patrimoniaux, promouvoir la fierté civique et stimuler le développement économique local.

The proposed amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act will help build strong communities and improve the quality of life for all the people of Ontario. It is time to change the Ontario Heritage Act. Il est temps de changer la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario.

Monsieur le Président, I forgot to tell you at the beginning that I'll share my time with two of my colleagues, from Stoney Creek and from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh.

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): Mr Speaker, it's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): You haven't been recognized yet.

The Chair recognizes the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh.

Mr Brownell: Sorry about that, Mr Speaker.

Tonight is an exciting evening—certainly an exciting evening for me. In my work in the riding and what I've done for the conservation and preservation of history and heritage—

Mr Marchese: Tell us about it.

Mr Brownell: I will be telling you about what I have done and what I am so proud of in my riding.

I would like to preface my remarks by first of all saying how proud I was this past Saturday when Madame la ministre was in my riding and she stood at perhaps the most historic spot in Ontario, and that is in historic St Andrews West, where lie the remains of the first Premier of our province, John Sandfield Macdonald. Madame la ministre had a chance to see his burial site. She had a chance to see the 1865 heritage inn that he built in that community, which today has been designated and restored and is a wonderful facility for anybody wishing fine dining. I welcome anybody from Ontario—

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): Where is it?

Mr Brownell: It's in St Andrews West.

Mr Colle: Where's that?

Mr Brownell: It's just north of Cornwall in the community of South Stormont.

This is a glorious time for everyone who cares about Ontario's heritage. The amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act that the McGuinty government has introduced would strengthen heritage protection in this province. Minister Meilleur has spoken very eloquently about the need to empower Ontario's residents, the municipalities and the heritage stakeholders to preserve and protect our provincial heritage resources. Her words spoke to me. They moved me because, as of May 5, 2004—this past May—I can personally claim my rightful status as an artifact of Canadian history, and I will explain that.

It was on May 5 of this year that the Canadian government announced 12 new designations of national historic significance: seven newly designated national sites, three historic persons and two national historic events. It's the events that I would like to allude to here. These two events include shipbuilding at the Burrard Dry Dock Co in Vancouver and, in my riding, the construction of the St Lawrence Seaway. It is this latter designation that arguably makes me an artifact of Canadian history. You see, on July 1, 1958, when I was a young lad of 10 years of age, the villages of Mille Roches, Moulinette, Wales, Dickinson's Landing, Farran's Point and Aultsville were submerged under the waters of the St Lawrence River and the new St Lawrence Seaway was born. With my birth community submerged and the designation of the St Lawrence Seaway as a national historic event on May 5 of this year, I believe I can now claim my status—and all those people who lived in those communities—as an artifact of Canadian history.

Hindsight is always 20/20, and I'm not here to second-guess how preceding governments, be they national or provincial, should or could have responded to the challenges of their times. But it is a matter of historic fact that the lead-up to the inundation of these historic towns was a rocky road, coloured by human anguish and loss. I was

there and I saw. I was in grade 4 on the last Friday in January 1958. We said goodbye to that school and moved to our new school in the community: Milles Roches Public School to Long Sault Public School, a school that I retired from teaching in, in December 2000.

To this day, many area residents maintain the view that these lost villages were casualties of progress. Prior to their inundation, the residents of these villages, including my birthplace of Moulinette, were relocated to New Town number 1 and New Town number 2, the earliest names by which Ingleside and Long Sault are known today. I challenge you all to come on down to the St Lawrence Seaway, visit our towns and you will see wonderful little communities along the St Lawrence which continue to grow. We've had tremendous growth in the last number of years while I served on municipal council.

As a life member and past president of the Lost Villages Historical Society, which operates the Lost Villages Museum in South Stormont, I have worked long and hard to ensure that these historic communities are not lost and not forgotten.

1910

Madeleine Meilleur commented about the recognition that is given to individuals in Ontario who work for the preservation and protection of history and heritage. I am mighty proud to say that it was in the autumn of 2000 that I received the Ontario Heritage community recognition award for my long-time involvement there. That's why I shall never let down my guard in the protection of what has to be protected in Ontario, and that is, the cultural, built and natural heritage of our communities.

One of the first paintings I hung on my wall here in my Queen's Park office was that of the Lost Villages Museum, displaying three of the recovered buildings from these lost communities. The historical society, of which I served as president for 11 years, developed the museum site and acquired historic and heritage buildings from the lost villages and surrounding townships. These buildings include the McLeod log house, the Moulinette Grand Trunk/CN railway station, the Zina Hill barber shop from Moulinette, the Manson/Lapierre grocery store from Mille Roches, the Ernie McDonald blacksmith shop, a Roxborough township schoolhouse, the Sandtown Advent Christian Church and the Forbes Memorial Building Reading Room library.

We have, with limited funds, moved those buildings and preserved them at our museum site. I'm absolutely proud of how the volunteers worked so hard, with limited funds, to develop a community where we can tell the story, and where they can continue to tell the story, of those six communities lost to the inundation of July 1, 1958.

As I speak—probably not right at this hour, but I'm sure today—there were members and volunteers from the Lost Villages Historical Society working at the museum site, for just recently the Lost Villages Historical Society relocated the Stuart home, built in 1810, to the museum site. It was built by Dr James Stuart, a United Empire Loyalist, on land upon which Wales, Ontario developed. Today, Wales is gone—it's one of our lost villages—and the Stuart home has seen its second move in almost 200 years of existence, but we were determined. Before I was elected to this House, I worked with the historical society, and we were determined to preserve that little piece of history. We now have a building at the museum site which is almost 200 years old. Working with the Lost Villages Historical Society to save this slice of United Empire Loyalist history has been one of the great experiences of my life in preserving history and heritage.

But I speak from first-hand experiences when I tell you that the work of the society in saving these buildings and artifacts and establishing the museum—well, it would all have been less daunting if we had had the benefits of the amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act currently under consideration by this assembly.

With my birthplace—which was also the birthplace of several generations of my ancestors—now far beneath the waters of the St Lawrence, I am particularly pleased by the features of the proposed amendments that will have an impact upon underwater and archaeological sites. The proposed amendments will enable the province to prohibit access to the most significant marine heritage sites without a site-specific licence.

The proposed changes would also increase fines for the illegal alteration of an archaeological site, to a maximum of $1 million; provide the province with the ability to inspect archaeological sites, to ensure compliance with the act; and increase access to the records of Ontario's archaeological heritage.

These and other proposed changes to the Ontario Heritage Act demonstrate our government's—the McGuinty government's—unwavering commitment to heritage protection and preservation. The amendments to the act will certainly serve as an inspiration to those eight forward-thinking municipalities—and I sure hope my municipality is in there one of these days—that have passed bylaws to offer tax reductions or refunds to owners of designated heritage properties. These include Amherstburg, Essex county, Kitchener, Markham, Newmarket, Peterborough, Port Hope and Windsor. I'm hoping that the list goes on and on, because we have to get our communities and our province moving in protecting the cultural, natural and built heritage of the province.

The amount of tax relief can be sizable: up to 40% of the taxes that would normally be paid on a property. It's a terrific incentive for people to maintain buildings of heritage significance. It's great news for communities that want to maintain their distinctive appeal and vital character while improving their quality of life. Municipalities and their resident heritage stakeholders want respect for local decision-making, as well as effective, flexible tools, such as heritage designation of individual properties and heritage conservation districts.

I'll just digress for a moment from some notes that I prepared here, but I look at the city of Cornwall. We have Heritage Cornwall working to protect and designate sites in that community, and to preserve a specific district. I speak of the Sydney Street district in the city, one of the

most historic, with glamorous homes, beautiful landscapes and mature trees. We need to protect those areas.

The proposed amendments delivered on this score will certainly help all those who work to preserve our heritage. Developers and the real estate industry want procedural fairness and requirements that are upfront, transparent and consistent. The proposed amendments deliver here as well, and those proposed amendments will allow for heritage groups, heritage organizations and historical societies to work with municipalities to preserve and protect our built heritage.

In her remarks, the minister commented about Doors Open Ontario. I have to say, I've been part of Doors Open Ontario for at least two years now, in promoting that program.

Mr Marchese: How many people show up?

Mr Brownell: A lot of people show up. It's been one of the most successful events with regards to making people aware of our built heritage.

We, in our municipality, this fall, in South Stormont, in the city of Cornwall and throughout the riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, will have an opportunity to throw open the doors of heritage structures that have been closed for a long time, throw open the doors so Ontarians can truly believe that it is the right thing to do to protect our history.

We shall continue as a government to work in that regard. Indeed, the proposed amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act represent a huge step forward for heritage conservation in this province overall. And I know that the historical societies, the LACACs—the local architectural conservation advisory committees—and the heritage groups in the municipalities throughout Ontario will be dancing in the street tonight, I'm sure, when they hear that we're debating this—

Interjection.

Mr Brownell: They are excited about what we are doing, right.

Interjection.

Mr Brownell: That's right, they can come to our Doors Open Ontario events and laud us for what we're doing.

Preserving our heritage is an evolutionary process that must address new challenges as they arise. The search for innovative solutions must never end. These amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act are a clear demonstration that the McGuinty government, a government that said yes to heritage, is committed to working with stakeholders all across this province, from all sectors, to ensure that Ontario is a leader in heritage conservation.

I'm delighted that the minister introduced Mr Smallwood from Ottawa, not far from my riding. I hope that Mr Smallwood takes some time to come down to the riding and see what we are doing for heritage conservation. I invite all Ontarians to come on down to the seaway and visit all of the sites along the St Lawrence, in Morrisburg and Iroquois, the Iroquois Lock, the only Canadian lock on the new seaway. When we say the new seaway, we mean the seaway finished in 1958—1954 to 1958. There they will see our freighters heading up with cargo and the like. So I invite them down, and they will see that in my community we have truly been blessed with volunteers who have been committed to preserving history and heritage. Heritage stakeholders, municipalities and Ontarians in general can rest assured that my government will continue to seek their valuable input as we strive to preserve and promote Ontario's heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. We will work with the stakeholders; we will work with community groups.

1920

I look at the council for the township of South Stormont. When I left that council, I was a believer that we had to support those people who worked so hard. That's why I was always a believer in the Ontario heritage community recognition award by the Ontario Heritage Foundation. That's why, when I left, I said to the council, "Please continue with that program," never believing I would be the recipient of that award when I stepped down from council. But I can say I was proud to launch it in my municipality. I am proud that the Ontario Heritage Foundation continues to respect those people who work in built, cultural and natural heritage.

Yes, we're talking about built heritage tonight in the main. We're talking about underwater heritage too, but we are also talking about natural heritage, saving and preserving those natural landscapes, saving and preserving the cultural heritage that makes our communities unique.

When I say "unique," I look at the community of St Andrews West, where the Minister of Culture was able to attend on Saturday. I have to say that I also thank the minister for coming to my riding to participate in the official opening of the St Lawrence River Institute of Environmental Studies. That's basically why she was in the riding, but I think I can say I killed two birds with one stone, for when she arrived at St Andrews, she was absolutely interested to see the heritage site of the final resting place of our great first Premier of this province, John Sandfield Macdonald.

Every day, when I come to the Legislative Building and walk up the front walk and look over to the right, and I see John Sandfield Macdonald's memorial, the full statue there, and see the painting of the Premier on the outside of the walls here at Queen's Park, it makes me so proud that the first Premier of this province was born and his house is still preserved in my riding. He articled in Cornwall and was a lawyer in Cornwall, and then his final resting place was chosen, St Andrews West, in sight of a building that he had the foresight to build for his community. Not only did it serve as a stagecoach inn, but he always believed in his community, just as people believe in their community today when protecting and preserving, because he reserved the basement of that heritage building, which is now designated for the community to be used following funerals, weddings and the like.

I invite everybody to come down, because today the downstairs section is a sports bar. The first floor is fine dining and the top level is our banquet hall. We're mighty proud of that 1865 building which has been preserved in St Andrews West. I invite you all to come down. This is my promotion of a little bit of our heritage.

But you know, it wasn't just today in my community that people were well aware and well into preserving the heritage of the community. I believe it was back in the 1930s that a group of local citizens got together and provided, with some direction from the Ontario government, a stone wall with a beautiful plaque beside the entrance to that cemetery. That plaque talks about John Sandfield Macdonald, and it also talks about another one of our great heroes, Simon Fraser.

Simon Fraser came to my community as a young lad with his mother. They fled the United States. He was a United Empire Loyalist who went out—and we all know the story of Simon Fraser and that great work of history out to the west, the Fraser River—Simon Fraser University, the Fraser River. But where will you find Simon Fraser's final resting place? In historic St Andrews West that the Madam Minister had a chance to see on Saturday. I know the Minister of Culture is watching my words very carefully tonight—I can't wait for the minister to take a heritage tour into my riding.

Mr Marchese: She's coming.

Mr Brownell: I know she'll be coming.

Mr Colle: She's already been three times.

Mr Brownell: She's been there, but she's coming to learn all about the history that we have preserved and to learn something about the history that we've lost. Because I can say, in the mid-1990s, I worked with a group of heritage-conscious individuals in the city of Cornwall to try to preserve the historic Capital Theatre. The Capital Theatre is gone. It was one of only two historic, atmospheric theatres in Ontario. We lost it to what they say is progress. No. We lost it because we didn't have the rules in place that would do what the rules that we're establishing will help municipalities do. So I am hoping that as we work as a government we continue to recognize those people who work in history and heritage, that we look to the built heritage of our communities and hold those heritage sites on a pedestal.

This year is the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Reverend Alexander MacDonell to the village of St Raphael's. St Raphael's is the birthplace of John Sandfield Macdonald, our first Premier. This year, we will have wonderful celebrations in St Raphael's to recognize the arrival of Reverend Alexander MacDonell, to understand what he's done for our community and to promote tourism.

So I say I've been excited to be on my feet tonight to speak to this. I'm excited for the simple reason that Madame Minister of Culture is committed to profiling the best in history and heritage, and making the act right.

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I stand before you tonight to declare that April 21, 2004, will go down in Ontario's history books as the date upon which the saving of Ontario's heritage was finally set in motion. This has much support, Minister.

April 21 was already a date of great historical significance. For example, on this day in history, Queen Elizabeth II was born and Henry VIII became king of England. These are historic facts, but as Samuel Crothers wrote in the Gentle Reader, "The trouble with facts is that there are so many of them." Ontarians cannot, however, say the same about the province's heritage resources.

Canada's own thinkers and writers had their unique perspective on the subject, but trust a humorist to cut to the chase in the simplest possible terms. Ontario's Stephen Leacock wrote, "Too much has been said of the heroes of history—the strong men, the troublesome men; too little of the amiable, the kindly and the tolerant."

These latter types—the blacksmiths, the cooks, the schoolteachers, the bricklayers, the carpenters, the miners, the dressmakers, the farmers and the gardeners—left behind more than their names in the pages of the history books. These people, our ancestors, built their communities to be strong, to harbour and to protect them from the harshness of this new land and to withstand the passage of time. When they passed on, they left behind for their children, their children's children and, finally, for us, a legacy of artifacts and built heritage. It is our responsibility to guard this legacy for future generations to learn from and to enjoy.

The past is alive all around us, and in meetings with heritage stakeholders, the concerns of Ontarians were communicated to us in clear and unambiguous terms. The McGuinty government had the ears to listen. What we heard very loudly and very clearly was that the Ontario Heritage Act is weak and outdated. We heard example after example of built heritage sites and buildings being bulldozed, regardless of their heritage value and without a second thought to their economic potential. Meanwhile, municipalities have been left to pay the price in lost economic potential and the erosion of local identity that defines and enriches the lives of the residents. Let me briefly review a list of recent casualties to give you an idea of what Ontario has lost to the bulldozer or the wrecker's ball over the past few years.

1930

Built almost entirely from locally quarried limestone, Bellevue House ranked among the finest examples of historical residential architecture in Hamilton. John Bradley, an Irish miller who settled in Hamilton in 1832, built the house between 1848 and 1850. A successful entrepreneur, store owner and tavern owner, land investor and leading local politician, Bradley's contribution to Hamilton's development was significant. Along with a handful of other limestone mansions in the city, Bellevue House represented Hamilton's rapid evolution from pioneer town to important manufacturing and shipping centre by the mid-19th century. Despite efforts by the residents and the municipality, Bellevue House was demolished in 2000.

Despite the best efforts of the Preserve Old Walkerville committee over a period of years, and despite the municipal council's passing a bylaw designating it a herit-

age site, Walkerville's Flat Iron Building was demolished in 1995. Here again, the existing Ontario Heritage Act did not give Preserve Old Walkerville, or POW, enough punch to save its local heritage. The residents of Walkerville in particular, and Ontarians in general, are all the poorer for it.

Ditto for the case of Glengarda's former Ursuline Convent and School, which was established in 1919. The Windsor Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee recommended the building's designation to the municipal council. The council complied. Nonetheless, this particular slice of Windsor's history fell to the bulldozer in 1998. In its place stands a condominium development.

It is sad stories like these that demonstrate the need for changes to our heritage protection laws. The proposed amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act, if passed, would give Hamilton, Windsor, and all other Ontario communities the tools to protect and preserve their heritage so that important buildings like Bellevue and Glengarda may be saved in the future.

Applause.

Ms Mossop: We've got a great cheering section over here, many heritage enthusiasts here this evening.

The proposed amendments include new municipal powers to prevent, not just delay, the demolition of heritage buildings—this amendment is counterbalanced with the landowner's right to a binding appeal—and new provincial powers to identify and designate heritage sites of provincial significance, as well as the power to prevent their demolition. Also, the proposed amendments would enable the Ministry of Culture to develop mandatory standards and guidelines for identifying and protecting heritage property owned or controlled by the province in consultation with provincial ministries and agencies affected.

If these amendments had been introduced earlier, Bellevue House in Hamilton, Walkerville's Flat Iron Building and Glengarda's historic Ursuline convent might still be standing today. As it is, their loss serves to underline the importance of what is at stake.

Other proposed amendments to the act provide greater clarity in the municipal heritage property designation process and empower municipalities further by providing better planning tools for the protection of heritage conservation districts. Can anyone in this House imagine a Paris without a Champs Élysées, a London without a Piccadilly, a Rome without a Coliseum? The great cities of the world long ago recognized the importance of the heritage conservation district.

This begs one of my classic stories, and I know I'll have the attention of my friends when I launch into one of my classic stories. It was not that long ago, about a year ago now, that I was just out of the delivery room with my small baby and I received a phone call to do a consultation job, consulting work, at a workshop in Paris, France. It was pretty difficult to turn that down, but I looked at this two-week-old baby in my arms and I wondered, how on earth am I going to manage to get myself to Paris, France, in four weeks with a two-week-old baby? But I could not say no to a trip to Paris, so I said yes, and somehow I managed to turn it into a family trip where we could take a six-week-old baby so she could enjoy her birthday in Paris.

But I started to worry when I was making these plans, because it had been 17 years since I had been to Paris. I wondered what might have happened in the intervening 17 years, because I had seen what can happen to places and buildings when they are not looked after.

I arrived in Paris, and what I found was a jewel of heritage. It was spectacular. I had actually forgotten how beautiful Paris is. Every avenue, every façade, every doorway, every alleyway is a delight for the eyes and a celebration of the soul. I was moved. When we left, we promised we would come back as soon as we could.

The reason why Paris is so beautiful is because they have had strict regulations to protect those buildings and their heritage.

The amendments being proposed hold that kind of promise—the kind of great promise for numerous municipalities across Ontario—because the heritage conservation district, planned and implemented strategically, can significantly revitalize a local economy. Why does everybody go to Paris? Because it's so beautiful; because of its culture; because of its heritage, so well preserved. They will come to our communities and our municipalities to see the same thing.

Increasingly, people are seeking out living and working spaces that offer something a little different. For many, the unique features of heritage buildings fit the bill. New-economy employers, footloose employees who can work anywhere and retiring baby boomers are choosing to locate in historic quarters where shopping, restaurants, cultural facilities and other amenities are within walking distance.

Across Ontario, historic properties are being restored and adapted to new uses. In urban centres, factories and warehouses are being converted to new residential and commercial uses. In small towns, main street properties are being rehabilitated, often combining retail downstairs and residential spaces upstairs.

If you really think about it, where do you want to work? Do you want to work in a little work station with four plain walls around you with no window, or do you want to be in a beautiful building that has a tangible history and a soul to it?

The Minister of Finance said to me one time that when he's having a particularly hard day—which they do have, these ministers of finance—"I take solace in the fact that I work in one of the most beautiful buildings in the province of Ontario."

Ontario's own Petrolia—Canada's Victorian oil town—serves to illustrate the impact of heritage district planning. In the heyday of the town's oil boom in the 1800s, Petrolia was one of the principal engines that drove Ontario's economy. Over time, the town's rich architectural heritage showed signs of significant deterioration. Some buildings were lost completely. In 1994, the community mobilized to save its own heritage. The

restoration program it undertook has served to revitalize Petrolia's downtown core. Small business owners are reporting significant increases in trade.

The municipal council's role was key to the success of this initiative. It provided the support necessary to bring the community together to achieve a common purpose.

The amended Ontario Heritage Act would empower municipalities to preserve their heritage and reinvigorate their business economies. Towns like Petrolia will serve as a beacon and a model of what can be achieved when a community's shared vision for the future intersects with respect for the past and heritage resources.

Examples of the innovative use of heritage sites and buildings around the province include a 12-acre steel foundry site established in Dundas circa 1880. It's being redeveloped into an adult lifestyle and retirement community. In Waterloo, a button factory built in 1866 subsequently served as a plywood factory, a glove factory and an office supplies store before it was designated by the city in 1982. The building has housed the Waterloo Community Arts Centre since 1993. In Toronto, a tin lithography factory built in 1900 was purchased by a local architect in 1994 and converted into desirable workspace for artists and dot-com companies.

Mr Speaker and members of this assembly, heritage resources are unlike other kinds of resources in that they are non-renewable. Once the bulldozer or the wrecking ball has levelled an historic building, no amount of money, effort or hope can bring it back. It's gone forever. Over time, it will even lapse from human memory. Its loss is irrevocable, complete and final. This is the tragedy that can befall unprotected heritage resources of virtually any description: a heritage building, a sunken ship, a rare forest or an archaeological site.

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Let there be no mistake; Ontarians genuinely care about their heritage resources and what happens to them. How else can you explain the resounding success of the Ontario Heritage Foundation's annual Doors Open Ontario initiative? In three short years, this OHF program has become Ontario's most popular heritage touring adventure. During the Doors Open season, which runs from April to mid-October, participating municipalities quite literally open the doors of local heritage sites, many of which are generally closed to the public, providing residents and visitors with free access to buildings and properties of architectural, historic and natural heritage value. This innovative opportunity to experience Ontario's rich heritage first-hand has been an unmitigated success since it was launched in 2002.

Heritage is not one of those hot-button issues that inspire attention-grabbing headlines in the daily media. Nonetheless, heritage resources have assumed a greater importance than ever before for the province's municipalities and provincial heritage stakeholders, as well as for individual Ontarians. Heritage encompasses the values and institutions we all share, as well as the distinct histories, expressions and aspirations of many of the communities and cultures that make up this province. Ontario's character and very identity are rooted in this rich and diverse heritage. Our heritage inspires us, enlightens us and guides us in our growth and development.

We are the current stewards of our heritage resources, and that is a great responsibility. We don't own them; we are just here to look after them. If we cherish and protect these resources, we can benefit from them, enjoy them and pass them on, intact and undiminished. It's like living off the interest while protecting the principal.

Many among us recognize heritage as a valuable cultural and social resource. Fewer may be aware of the direct economic benefits and spinoffs of heritage conservation: for example, revitalizing main streets and downtowns, creating jobs, enhancing desirability of neighbourhoods and bringing tourist dollars into the community.

In a world growing smaller by the minute under the forces of globalization, heritage conservation has, in fact, become a form of community economic development, and a highly efficient one at that. Heritage resources are present in every community in many different forms: museums; archive and library collections; historic buildings, barns and monuments; bridges and railway stations; cemeteries; archaeological sites and artifacts; streetscapes and landscapes. Heritage resources are a big part of what makes every community unique. After all, what would Kingston be without its limestone buildings? Can you imagine Cobourg without a Victoria Hall, Elliot Lake without the Nuclear and Mining Museum, Cobalt without its mine headframes, or Petroglyphs Provincial Park without the petroglyphs?

There are currently 130 municipal heritage committees operating in this province, 65 heritage conservation districts and approximately 20,000 known archaeological sites that have been documented by the Ministry of Culture. Currently, over 75,000 Ontario volunteers are actively involved in some kind of heritage conservation initiative.

These numbers tell me that Ontarians are demanding better protection for their heritage, the kind of protections that these amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act will make possible. The McGuinty government is the first government to bring forward comprehensive amendments to the Ontario act since its introduction back in 1975. All irony aside, it is about time.

These amendments would support the development of strong, vital communities, promote our prosperity and improve the quality of life of all people in Ontario. Our built heritage is an expression of our souls. It is the intangible essential of humanity.

Mr Speaker, I'd like leave to my colleagues and you with a few words by the well-known Canadian journalist Robert Fulford to ponder. Mr Fulford wrote: "Neglect of the past is one of the great dangers of our epoch. Rushing into the future, we are perpetually in danger of letting our traditions become an overgrown graveyard that no one bothers to tend or visit."

I was recently at a heritage conference in Hamilton, and there was a world-renowned expert there, Anthony Tung, who has visited successful heritage cities all over

the world. He said there is one thing that stands between success and failure. He said those who succeed in preserving their heritage have strong legislation.

As long as the McGuinty government is steering the course, the people of Ontario will be heard. The proposed amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act are music to their ears. They have long been called for, and we are delivering. I implore the members of this House to support their adoption and implementation and provide Ontario with the strong legislation that it needs to protect our heritage, to celebrate our history as human beings in this area.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to listen to the comments by the member for Stoney Creek, and many of them I would celebrate with her: the importance of heritage and culture and the preservation of the same.

I believe, in the purest sense, most members here would agree that preserving our heritage more belongs to the Conservative caucus, because we are a party of tradition, valuing traditions and heritage. If you looked at the actions taken by us as government, I think we were quite respectful of the role of the municipality here. I understand this debate more thoroughly because I'm listening to my municipality of Clarington, in my riding of Durham, which is undergoing a very exhaustive discussion with respect to the designation of a heritage district. It's quite contentious because on the property rights side—we know that at the end of the day, this is a property rights issue. It gives quite distinct powers, and new powers, I might add. In the briefing that I received today from the minister—I do respect the minister for taking the time to brief the opposition parties.

We do agree and I think we have to find some reasonable balance here, to respect the rights of property owners versus the overarching authority of government. In a heritage district, where you get conflicting views, specifically in a wonderful community like Bowmanville, incorporated in 1856—and I think of the village of Newcastle, which was where the Massey family built and demonstrated a respect for heritage and culture that you must visit. You must visit the riding because the village of Orono this week—you'll see it on 35-115—has the RCMP Musical Ride.

We respect heritage, but we also respect property rights issues. I caution the minister on getting the right balance, not pushing too hard but doing the right thing.

Mr Marchese: I want to say to the people watching that I'll be speaking at approximately 9 o'clock, give or take a couple of minutes, in case you're interested in my opinion. I'll have about half an hour to say what I have to say.

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: I hope I'll be speaking at 9 o'clock, in the event that everything goes well, but you never know what might happen.

In the meantime, in the event that it doesn't happen, I want to say to Mme Meilleur that I support her bill. I do have suggestions to make the bill meilleur, which she may or may not accept. It will be interesting to see whether or not she might. But there are things we could do, I think, to strengthen the bill.

Interjection: Make it better.

Mr Marchese: Make it meilleur, like Mme Meilleur.

But in the meantime, just to say that we support it, with some suggestions that I'll be making, approximately around 9 o'clock, allowing for the Conservative Party to permit us to have this debate, but we don't know.

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Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I rise today to support the Ministry of Culture's Bill 60, the Ontario Heritage Amendment Act, 2004. I'm very much delighted to support this bill because, if passed, it will help us to preserve and promote the precious heritage landmarks in this great province of ours, and in Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale.

If this bill is passed, it will give new powers to municipalities so that municipalities will be able to prevent the demolition of heritage sites. It gives municipalities the power to prohibit rather than delay the demolition of properties designated under the present act. At this time, municipalities are able to delay the demolition by 180 days only, after which the owner can proceed, provided they have obtained a building permit for the replacement building on the property.

So this bill would help to improve the designation process by setting standards for the designation criteria. At the same time, this bill also provides property owners with the right of appeal when property owners do not want to consent to the demolition of the designated heritage property. This bill would also give the Minister of Culture the power to designate and prohibit the demolition of heritage properties of provincial significance.

I strongly support this bill. I urge all other members to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from—

Interjection: Come on, she's in your own caucus.

The Acting Speaker: I know. I want to get it right. Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, all the names.

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): Thank you, finally, Mr Speaker. It's a pleasure tonight to stand. I've listened to my colleagues on both sides of the Legislature speak tonight on the importance of heritage for Ontario. I truly believe it certainly is important to protect Ontario's heritage. My brother has written many books on the history of the area that I come from.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): A very learned gentleman.

Ms Scott: He is. But I have to agree with the member from Durham that we have to have a nice balance here and protect the property rights of the owners of the heritage buildings. I know that my colleague from Nepean-Carleton is going to speak at length on some of our issues with the bill later.

But it's important to work with the municipalities to preserve our heritage. I come from the long riding name of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, which is bound by historyical plaques all over the riding. It encompasses the largest

geographical portion of the Trent-Severn Waterway and it's been the most travelled, most scenic part—Champlain even wrote in the 1600s in his journals about the beauty of Kawartha Lakes, which is the Indian name for "land of shining waters."

Interjections.

Ms Scott: It is. See, I'm educating my colleagues on that.

Bobcaygeon, being one of the oldest locks, was built in 1833. My colleague from Peterborough isn't here tonight but I know that the Peterborough Lift Lock, which is part of the Trent-Severn locks, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. To think that back in those times, shovels and picks and dynamite were the only way they built those locks. They've been refurbished slightly, but still, the engineering feat at that time was very significant.

Lots of historical societies: Greater Harvey Historical Society, Victoria County Historical Society, Beaverton historical society, Burleigh Road Historical Society—lots of municipal historical societies. I know that there's a mention of districts in the area, and I'll be looking forward to some districts forming in my riding to encompass all the history that it wishes.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Hon Mrs Meilleur: I would like to thank those who spoke so eloquently about Bill 60. I want to thank the member for Stoney Creek, who is my parliamentary assistant—it was very well done and gracious—and the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, who spoke with passion about his heritage and his area. Yes, I was there on Saturday again, and it's a beautiful, well-preserved area. And to the members from Durham and Trinity-Spadina and the representative from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, thank you for speaking positively about my bill.

As I said previously, it's not only the heritage organizations that are in favour of Bill 60, but the municipalities and the developers. I would remind the member from Nepean-Carleton about the beautiful heritage property that we've preserved in Ottawa. It's not only because of the politicians, but also because of the developers in our area. I point out again Sandy Smallwood, who is in attendance today and has a lot of positive experience. I wish that you all had one Sandy Smallwood in your community. I wanted to take two minutes to speak about Wallace House. Wallace House is a success story. This was the first hospital in Ottawa, and it was to be demolished. Sandy preserved it. Now it's 40 beautiful loft apartments in Ottawa, and everybody enjoys it. Thank you again, Sandy, for doing that.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Nepean-Carleton.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I'm shocked, surprised, troubled that I'm standing up to speak in favour of a government bill. Je ne suis pas un très bon porte-parole pour la culture pour l'opposition officielle à cause du fait que j'ai beaucoup d'admiration pour madame la ministre de la Culture.

Certainly we on this side of the House want to have discussions about how we might facilitate this. At this point, I know I want to talk to my caucus colleagues—we have our caucus meeting tomorrow— about this bill and get their input before any decisions are made. There are certainly a lot of the things that Mr Tsubouchi moved when he was minister. Given that this bill has such a substantial amount of support, with some suggested amendments—and I appreciate M. Guy Lepage, qui a donné un briefing pour quelques-uns de nos députés cet après-midi.

There are three areas where we've suggested some amendments. One is potentially a five-year review of this legislation to make sure it's doing what we expect it to do, that it's not going too far, or not far enough. Second is that there is an actual value assessment for the properties once they've been designated, because potentially, while something may be culturally valuable, it may not be commercially valuable after it receives a designation, so it would be abhorrent for the property owner to have to pay as if it had full value. I see some members opposite showing some agreement to that. And third, most of the powers in the act are vested with the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Perhaps all of them could be vested there, to provide a further check to ensure that they're exercised wisely and well.

Given that these discussions will be ongoing, might I suggest that, given that all parties are likely to support this legislation and that perhaps some time would be worthwhile for discussions about these between the House leaders and madame la ministre, perhaps I could ask—perhaps I could say what I'm going to do before I do it: that we just deem a day of debate having taken place on this important piece of legislation. It would help facilitate some discussion that obviously can't take place this evening with the prospective potential amendments. We shouldn't sit here and debate something that there is unanimous agreement on, with perhaps some tinkering, particularly with respect to property rights, a concern of some folks in my party—but perhaps should move on to other, more important issues.

Having said that, I have a motion carefully drafted by one of the wise helmswomen of the table.

I would seek unanimous consent that the House shall adjourn and that tonight's debate be considered a full sessional day for the purposes of standing order 46.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Mr Baird: Then I move that the House do adjourn and that tonight's debate be considered one full sessional day for the purposes of standing order 46.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

The House is adjourned until 1:30 pm tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2001.

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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Public accounts / Comptes publics

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente: Julia Munro
Laurel C. Broten, Jim Flaherty,
Shelley Martel, Bill Mauro, Julia Munro,
Richard Patten, Shafiq Qaadri,
Liz Sandals, Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Tony C.Wong
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Khalil Ramal
Bob Delaney, Kevin Daniel Flynn,
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